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THE MANDARIN COAT

AND FIVE OTHER ONE-ACT PLAYS FOR LITTLE THEATRES

BY

ALICE C. D. RILEY

Author of "Ten Minutes by the Clock," etc.

NEW YORK

BRENTANO'S

PUBLISHERS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEDICATED TO

THE PLAY SHOP

SCHOOL OF SPEECH

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

ORIGINAL CASTS

The first production of these plays were made as follows:

On June 22, 1921 in the Garden of Miss Eleanor Bissell, Pasadena, California

THEIR ANNIVERSARY

Flora Drummond . . .	Mrs. Clinton C. Clarke
Jane Jones	Eloise Stirling
Nora	Grace McLenore
Gerald Drummond . .	George Judd
Tom Jones	Robert Clark
Messenger Boy . . .	Earl Huggins

Directed by Gilmore Brown of The Pasadena Community Playhouse.

Scene: The veranda of the Drummond's cottage.

on April 19, 1922 at the Pasadena Community Playhouse

THE MANDARIN COAT

Katy, a Maid	Ella Heffner
Dorothy Mendon . . .	Ruth A. Braislin
Robert Lennox . . .	William Austin
John Mendon	W. R. McComb
Edith Chester	Annina Doyle

Directed by Gilmore Brown.

Scene: The Mendon's living room.

THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PLAYSHOP

On January 18, 1924
Under the Direction of Alexander Dean
presented

THREE ONE ACT PLAYS

By Alice C. D. Riley

THE SPONGE

Characters

In Order of Appearance

Ralph Forrester	Carl Gutenkunst
Katharine	Helen Houghton
Alfredo Frascati	James Griffin
Nina Aristo	Helen Bowles
Bettina	Catherine Miller

Scene—Nina's studio-apartment in New York City.
Directed by Miss Constance Welch.

RADIO

Characters

Mamie Stewart	Maxine Burtis
Ted Connelly	John Bryant
Jim Stewart	David McCullough

Scene—A new farm on the plains of western Kansas.
Directed by Miss Winifred Ward.

THE BLACK SUITCASE

Characters

Mother	Hope Summers
Bridget	Mary Gorrell
Father	Carl Bowman
Sis	Isabel Taves
Bud	Sabin Burmen
Jack	Ward McCann
Terrence	Verne Thomas
Bootlegger	Frank Nosak

Scene—A living room in the suburbs of any American city.
Directed by Miss Dorothea Fry.

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THE MANDARIN COAT [1]

A Comedy

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"The Mandarin Coat" was first published in *The Drama*, January 1923.

CHARACTERS

John Mendon, 40 years old. Business man.

Dorothy Mendon, his wife, 23 years old.

Robert Lennox, 30 years old, bachelor friend of Dorothy's.

Edith Chester, 28 years old, unmarried, friend of Dorothy's.

Katy, Maid at the Mendons'.

THE MANDARIN COAT

The drawing-room of the Mendons' house in a California city is a handsome, formal room, evidently a man's room to which have been added several new and more frivolous pieces. The rear wall of the room is the front wall of the house, and is cut by two French windows, through which may be seen the trees of the avenue. Between these two windows stands the grand piano with its keyboard at right-angles to the wall and toward the right. There is a piano bench before it. A vase with a single rose is on the piano. To the left of the second window, a Chinese screen stands out at right-angles to the rear wall, and beyond it is a small table with a smoker's outfit.

In the left wall there is a door opening into the library. In the center of this wall there is a fireplace with mantel, mirror and clock. A large divan stands at the upper side of the fireplace and at right-angles to it, so that the divan and the screen form two sides of a partly enclosed nook. A fire burns in the fireplace.

The right wall is broken at the center by a wide opening into the hall, which is seen beyond it. This opening and the windows have heavy hangings which draw.

The other furnishings consist of: A heavy chair at

upper right; a small writing-table and chair at the right down stage; and a tea-table with small sofa and chair beside it a little to the right of center. The two groups last mentioned are more frivolous in style than the other furnishings.

[*It is half-after four of a December afternoon.* KATY *is mending the fire. The front door-bell rings.* KATY *continues to mend the fire and the bell rings again, almost immediately. Stolidly,* KATY *puts in place the tongs and goes to the door. Gay voices and laughter are heard, and* DOROTHY *enters, followed closely by* BOBBY *and, in a moment, by* KATY.]

DOROTHY. Oh, Bobby, Bobby! [*She laughs.*] That's a whopper, Bobby. You always did tell such big ones.

BOBBY. I learned it of you, Dots.

DOROTHY [*Laughing*]. Bad boy! You taught me.

BOBBY. It's only my vivid imagination, Dorothy. Anyway, I'm awfully glad I happened to be passing just as you reached home. I'm longing for one of your good cups of tea—and the little cakes, you remember?

DOROTHY. Still a sweet tooth, Bobby! Katy, take Mr. Lennox's things. You may leave my muff [*As* KATY *starts to take it*]. I'll take it up. You have tea all ready to serve?

KATY. Yes, ma'am.

DOROTHY. Then serve it as quickly as you can make the tea—oh! and bring some of the little chocolate cakes cook made this morning. [KATY *goes out.*]

BOBBY. Ah! chocolate cakes! Ummm!

DOROTHY [*Smiling*]. Always lucky, eh, Bobby?

BOBBY [*Dryly*]. Not *always*, Dorothy. There *was* a time——

DOROTHY [*Crossing to the fire, laughing*]. Oh, don't be a crape-hanger, Bobby. [*She shivers.*] I'm glad there's a fire. Brrr! How raw the fog is today! [*She stretches her hands to the fire.*]

BOBBY. I hadn't noticed it.

DOROTHY. Well, you should. You're getting old enough to have rheumatism and things. [*She laughs.*] How old are you, Bobby?

BOBBY [*Grinning*]. Just what I used to be—seven years older than you, Dots, and you're——

DOROTHY. Twenty-three. But I feel a hundred today.

BOBBY. Ummmmm! In the old days, that used to mean tummy or—conscience. Which is it?

DOROTHY [*Unwillingly*]. Conscience.

BOBBY. Ah-ha! Conscience, eh? Murder? Arson? Theft? I'll wager it's your old sin, Dolly—extravagance.

DOROTHY [*Nodding*]. Both.

BOBBY. Both?

DOROTHY. Extravagance—and theft.

BOBBY. Oh, come, I say—you——

DOROTHY. Sssh! Katy! [*She advances to the table as* KATY *enters with the tea-tray, which she places there.* DOROTHY *seats herself on the sofa, and mo-*

tions to BOBBY *to take the little chair. He does so at his leisure.*] That's very nice, Katy. Thank you. Has my husband come in yet?

KATY. No ma'am, Mr. Mendon seldom gets home, ma'am, before five o'clock.

DOROTHY [*With an amused look at* BOBBY]. Yes, Katy, I've observed that, too. Be sure you make him fresh toast and tea, then, at five.

KATY [*She needs no reminder*]. Yes, ma'am. I always do, ma'am. [*She goes out.*]

DOROTHY. You see, John's servants still regard me as an intruder. Two lumps, wasn't it, Bobby? They all persist in telling me things about his habits— "Mr. Mendon does this, ma'am" and "Mr. Mendon likes that, ma'am." They think I can't have learned in half a year. Yes, Bobby, [*She hands the tea*] half a year! Half a year! Just think of it! It seems as if I'd been married forever.

BOBBY [*Spreading his napkin over his knee expectantly*]. Ah-ha! that's your conscience. Come now, 'fess up, Dolly. What have you done?

DOROTHY. Chocolate cake, Bobby! [*She passes it. He munches happily.*] Never have lost your trench appetite for chocolate, have you, old dear?

BOBBY. Now, Dots, don't beat about the bush. Come! Out with it! What *is* the horrid crime?

DOROTHY [*Settling to her own tea, and not reluctant to relieve her mind by a confessional*]. Well, you see, Bobby, it was this way. You know Wang Lee's shop right back of us on the avenue here?

BOBBY [*Munching*]. Umm! Chinese curio shop. Damn robbers, eh, what!

DOROTHY. Shut up, Bobby, and eat your cake. Have another, do. Wang Lee has had a glo-oo-rious coat—Mandarin coat, you know. I've run back through the garden every day to look at it; it's only a step. I've longed for it for *weeks*.

BOBBY. Weeks? Why this self-restraint?

DOROTHY. I told John about it this morning at breakfast.

BOBBY [*Expectantly*]. Well? And he said "My dearest love, here's a million dollars. Go buy it."

DOROTHY. Nothing of the sort.

BOBBY. Eh, no? What then?

DOROTHY. He said, "A Mandarin coat is not your style."

BOBBY. Ummm! [*He thinks this over.*] Rather think he's right, Dolly. [*He passes his cup for more tea.*]

DOROTHY [*Pouring*]. Traitor! This isn't your think, Robert Lennox, nor John's either. *I* want that coat.

BOBBY. Then, of course, you must have it. [*Holding out his cup for the sugar, which she has forgotten.*] Two lumps please—two.

DOROTHY [*Dropping in the sugar*]. This afternoon, as I happened to pass the shop——

BOBBY. *Happened?* Oh, Dolly!

DOROTHY [*Severely*]. Happened. I saw there was an auction going on.

BOBBY [*Beginning to laugh*]. An auction! Ye gods!

DOROTHY. And I went in just to see——

BOBBY [*Roaring*]. Oh, Dolly, don't pretend to *me*.

DOROTHY [*Trying to convince herself*]. Well, I just thought——

BOBBY [*Springing up*]. I know what happened.

DOROTHY. You don't.

BOBBY. *I do.* I'll show you. Where's the coat?

DOROTHY [*Shame-faced*]. In my muff.

BOBBY [*As he gets it*]. "You may leave my muff, Katy, I'll take it up." [*He laughs.*] Ha! Here it is—and a beauty, too. [*He shakes it out and springs upon the piano bench, flourishing it.*] Ladies and Gentlemen. Ladies and Gentlemen! This Mandarin coat, which you see before you, is one of the finest of my collection. This wonderful rainbow border indicates the highest rank, and this seed embroidery is of the old régime. In short, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is really a museum piece and belongs in a fine collection. Look at it, Ladies and Gentlemen! Look at it! Its beautiful colors, its priceless embroidery, its—How much am I offered? How much? How much? How much?

DOROTHY. Three dollars. [*She leans back against the sofa cushions, laughing.*]

BOBBY [*Scornfully*]. *Three* dollars! Madam! I blush to name such a price for so magnificent a garment. A coat worthy of a Prince Royal. Three dollars—three dollars——

DOROTHY [*She has by this time entered into the game*]. A man said: "Five."

BOBBY. And five. Five dollars, five dollars—ten dollars? [*Pretending to get a bid from the other side.*] Thank you, sir. Ten dollars—ten dollars——

DOROTHY. Fifteen.

BOBBY. Fifteen. Thank you, Madam! fifteen—fifteen—fifteen——

DOROTHY. Then a fat woman over there [*pointing*] with a marcel wave bid twenty.

BOBBY [*Bowing to the left*]. Thank you, fat-lady-with-the-marcel-wave! Twenty dollars—twenty dollars! Twenty—twenty—twenty——

DOROTHY [*Excited*]. Twenty-five.

BOBBY [*Bowing to her*]. Twenty-five, Madam, and cheap at the price. Look at its magnificence! Think of the Mandarin of high degree who wore it—eh——

DOROTHY. No, no, Bobby, *don't* think of that!

BOBBY [*Hastily correcting himself*]. No, no, Ladies and Gentlemen, *don't* think of that. I assure you, Ladies and Gentlemen, this coat was made for the Emperor himself—and never worn—*never worn.* Twenty-five—twenty-five——

[*By this time* DOROTHY *has risen and is standing beside the piano, laughing at his sallies, clapping her hands, almost persuaded that she is again at the auction.*] Twenty-five—twenty-five——

DOROTHY [*Shouting*]. Seventy-five dollars for the Emperor's coat!

BOBBY [*Increasing his volume and tempo from here*

on]. Seventy-five! Bravo! Seventy-five—seventy—And eighty? Thank you, sir, Eighty—eighty—eighty——

DOROTHY. Ninety.

BOBBY. Bravissimo! Ninety—ninety—ninety—going at ninety. Going once—going twice——

DOROTHY. The fat marcel bid ninety-five.

BOBBY. Ah, ha! Ninety-five—ninety-five—Going once—go——

DOROTHY [*Dropping into her chair*]. One hundred.

BOBBY. One hundred. Going at one hundred. Going once—going twice——

DOROTHY. That's all, Bobby. I got it for a hundred.

BOBBY [*His show-man's instinct finishing the job*]. Gone at one hundred dollars. [*He jumps down and bows before* DOROTHY.] Madam, allow me to congratulate you on your bargain. Behold! [*He spreads out the coat before her. She is lying back in her chair, laughing; quite done in by the excitement.*] Come on, Dots, let's see it on you. [*He holds it for her. She rises and slips it on. They both admire it and* DOROTHY *looks at herself in the mirror.*]

DOROTHY. Do you like it?

BOBBY. Ripping! You look like Madam Butterfly.

[*He slips onto the piano bench and begins to play something from the opera. She walks up and down, flaunting the coat. He rises, helps her off with the coat, which he tosses on the piano while she sinks*

again upon her sofa. He lights a cigarette and comes down to the table.]

BOBBY. It *is* cheap at one hundred, Dolly, but where did you get the hundred?

DOROTHY [*Groaning with sudden remembrance*]. I stole it.

BOBBY. Stole? Ha! [*Seeing her trouble he becomes grave, and seating himself at the table, smokes thoughtfully.*] Tell me about it, old girl.

DOROTHY. Oh, it's awful, Bobby! How could I forget it for a moment! [*He blows smoke-rings and nods encouragingly.*] You know what a particular man John is. He wants everything exactly so: meals exactly on time; rooms exactly in order; hat on exactly straight; bills paid exactly when due, the servants, especially, with crisp, new bills—says it makes them neater and more exact. It's a fad of his. Oh, Bobby, I shall never be good enough for John! [*She cries into her handkerchief.*]

BOBBY [*Gravely*]. Ummm! There might be two opinions about *that.* You were never exactly *exact*, though, were you, Dolly? [*He smiles at her reminiscently.*]

DOROTHY [*Shaking her head sadly*]. I've really tried awfully hard, Bobby, not to be such a harum-scarum. Lately he's been teaching me responsibility —running the house, paying off the servants and all that. I try to live up to John's expectations, but somehow, just when I think I'm doing pretty well, he'll say something that—that shows me I have—have

spilled the beans, Bobby. [*She laughs, on the verge of tears.*]

BOBBY [*Patting her hand encouragingly*]. How did you do it *this* time, Dots?

DOROTHY. He'd given me a sping-spang new one-hundred-dollar bill this morning, to pay Katy's month's wages.

BOBBY [*Light breaking*]. Ah! and you——?

DOROTHY. That's the one hundred.

BOBBY. Um! Oh, well, that's a small matter. No man expects his wife to be honest about housekeeping money.

DOROTHY [*Forlornly*]. John does.

BOBBY [*He whistles, then tries to laugh if off*]. Well, if you'd married me that time—those *many* times I asked you, Dolly, I'd have known better than ever to have trusted you with one hundred dollars. Wouldn't I?

DOROTHY. Don't be absurd, Bobby. You never had one hundred dollars.

BOBBY [*Falling to the depths*]. Damn it all, that's right!

DOROTHY [*Seeing he takes it to heart*]. Never mind, Bobby; we all love you for it.

BOBBY [*Refusing comfort*]. *She* doesn't.

DOROTHY [*Electrified*]. *She?* Bobby Lennox! Do you mean to tell me you are in love with some one—*now?*

BOBBY. Awfully, but——

DOROTHY. No *but* about it. Tell me.

BOBBY [*Pacing*]. Hang it all, Dolly, it's impossible. I'm such an impecunious cuss. You see, since I got back from France, I've only just barely got going again, and *you* know better than anybody else how I spent my money before I went over.

DOROTHY. On extravagant me! Oh, dear, Bobby, I'm so sorry! And then I——

BOBBY. You turned me down. Good thing, too. Glad you did. But would you mind, Dots, telling me *just why you did?* It would illuminate my present problem.

DOROTHY [*Taken aback and none too much flattered*]. Why, Bobby, it was so long ago—I—you——

BOBBY. Come now, Dots, this is serious with me. I'm horribly in love, but she's got money and I'm stony broke. It seems impossible to me. It would help a lot to know why you refused me. Maybe it's awfully indelicate of me to ask, but—was it my looks, my conversation, my personality, or my poverty? Which? Or perhaps all? Why *did* you turn me down, Dots? You seemed fond of me.

DOROTHY. I was. Awfully. Am still. But——

BOBBY [*Intent*]. *But!* Ha! *Now* we're getting it.

DOROTHY [*Kindly*]. Well, Bobby dear, you're like a glass of champagne—and especially dear *these* days. You're the crest of the wave; the song of the lark; a Whistler sketch; Muratore's high "C." That's what you are to me, Bobby, and I adore all those things, only——

BOBBY [*Very intent*]. Only?

DOROTHY. Only even *then* I had sense enough to know that if I married you, Bobby, it would be like walking the tight-rope all the rest of my life—yes, walking the tight-rope. I'm giddy-headed, and I wanted solid rock under my feet.

BOBBY [*Soberly*]. And so you married John?

DOROTHY. And so I married John. [BOBBY *lights another cigarette and begins to pace.*] Still, Bobby, I love to try the tight-rope now and then. It's so exciting.

BOBBY. Hummm! [*Pacing.*]

DOROTHY. Why do you look so serious?

BOBBY. Because you make me realize I've no right to ask her.

DOROTHY. *Ask* her! Do you mean to say you haven't asked her yet?

BOBBY [*Shaking his head ruefully*]. No. I'm afraid.

DOROTHY [*Suddenly realizing they are in the same box*]. Oh, Bobby, so am I!

BOBBY [*Too intent on his own troubles to understand*]. Afraid of her?

DOROTHY. No, no—Oh, no, no, no! Afraid—of John. Oh, Bobby, he's so wonderful!

BOBBY [*Gloomily*]. So's she. [*They are sunk in gloom for a moment.*]

DOROTHY [*Curiosity awakening*]. But you haven't told me her name yet. Who *is* she?

BOBBY. Edith Chester.

DOROTHY. Edith Chester! No! [*She laughs suddenly.*]

BOBBY [*Offended*]. Oh, come, I say, that's not nice of you, Dots.

DOROTHY. I beg your pardon, Bobby. [*Seriously.*] You know very well Edith is my best and most dearly loved friend. I was only remembering the things you used to say in the old days about her being a tom-boy. In those days, you remember, you were all for the feminine type.

BOBBY. In those days I was a good bit of an ass.

DOROTHY. You see, Bobby, you are just like me. *You* want solid rock under your feet.

BOBBY [*Suspicious*]. If you mean her money——

DOROTHY. No, Bobby, I'm not thinking of her money.

BOBBY [*Hotly*]. Well I *am*. How can a mere clerk in a bank ask the daughter of the president to marry him? It's absurd.

DOROTHY. Nonsense, Bobby! Marry her, marry her!

BOBBY. She'd not have me, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. I think she will. Any girl would jump at the chance.

BOBBY [*Refusing comfort*]. You didn't, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. Ah, but she doesn't feel the need of a rock under her feet. I'll wager she doesn't. You see, she *is* the rock. [*Determined to cheer him.*] Come, I'll be your confessor, Bobby, when did it happen?

BOBBY. Oh, over there, of course. I was in her

hospital ward. I almost asked her then, but——

DOROTHY. "Faint heart never won fair lady." Come, Bobby, buck up. Be brave! They say you were a lion of courage when——

BOBBY [*Scornfully*]. Oh, that!—But to face Edith without a penny in my pocket,—it can't be done.

DOROTHY [*Struck with an idea*]. Bobby!

BOBBY. Yes?

DOROTHY. I have an inspiration.

BOBBY. Well?

DOROTHY. Since you lack the courage to face Edith, why not write her a note—here—now? Let me give it to her when she comes in tonight—you know the Langdon's dinner—aren't you invited?

BOBBY. Yes, I'm invited.

DOROTHY. Well, Edith is going with us.

BOBBY. So am I then.

DOROTHY [*Craftily*]. And suppose you—buy her —a Mandarin coat—and give it to her—as an engagement present?

BOBBY [*Speechless*]. But—she—she may not have me, you know.

DOROTHY. Oh, yes she will. I'm sure of it.

BOBBY [*Delighted*]. Oh, are you now, really? [*Then doubt takes him captive again.*] No, no, I'm afraid to risk it—yet. Wait till I make my fortune.

DOROTHY. And both get old and scrappy? Never! She'd love the coat, Bobby. I heard her admiring one only the other day. [*Wheedlingly.*] She'd *love* it,—and you'd win your bride and I'd be

able to pay Katy, and John need never know. [*She watches him anxiously.*]

BOBBY [*Embarrassed*]. But—it seems to me—it's hardly done, you know. It would seem awfully nervy of me to buy it ahead, wouldn't it, just as if I were sure she'd say yes?—and a Mandarin coat, too—by Jove! —besides, I've not got the money, you know.

DOROTHY. I don't believe you're in love at all.

BOBBY [*Holding his head*]. Good Lord, I wish I weren't!

DOROTHY [*Coaxingly*]. Come, sit down here and let's try the note anyway. [*She leads him to the desk and pushes him gently down on the stool, puts a piece of note paper before him and a pen in his hand*]. There! Now you're no good if you can't write her a note that will win her.

BOBBY [*Lost*]. Er—what shall I say?

DOROTHY. "Darling."

BOBBY [*Jumping*]. Oh, I say!

DOROTHY. Don't you think of her as "darling"?

BOBBY. Yes, yes, of course, but I——

DOROTHY. Then write it. "Darling!"

BOBBY [*Repeating softly*]. Darling! [*He writes with growing enthusiasm, becoming unconscious of all else.*]

DOROTHY [*Dictating*]. "I am writing this to tell you how much I love you"—or something *original* like that. [*She pauses.* BOBBY, *however, is off at last, and is writing absorbedly. Finally she warns him.*] Don't forget to tell her about the coat.

BOBBY [*Stopping at the fatal word*]. But, Dots, I haven't got the money. Let's see. [*He turns his pockets inside out and they both count the result.*] One dollar—fifty cents—two—ten—twenty—twenty-five—thirty-two. Two dollars and thirty-two cents. Gosh!

DOROTHY [*Desperate*]. Haven't you something you could sell?

BOBBY. Not a blooming thing. And asking Edith to marry me—Idiot! [*He starts to crumple his letter, but she prevents him.*]

DOROTHY [*Deadly persistent*]. Where's that heirloom pearl you used to have?

BOBBY. That? Oh, kicking around somewhere, I suppose.

DOROTHY. That's it! Sell it—pawn it—anything. Bobby—please!

BOBBY. It doesn't seem quite——

DOROTHY [*Angry*]. Oh, of course, if you feel that way. I should have known better than to ask you.

BOBBY [*Very unhappy*]. But, Dots, don't you see —Oh, well, have it your own way! What shall I say about it? [*He turns back to the letter.*]

DOROTHY [*Enormously relieved*]. Say—say you bought it thinking of her; and beg her, if she is willing to give you encouragement, to wear it at the Langdon dinner tonight. [*He is busily writing.*] As I told you she is running in to go with us tonight. When she comes, I'll give it to her, and then I'll leave the room.

You can be on the watch outside, and in a minute or two you can come in. I'll give you a bit of a time together. I'm—I'm sure she'll wear it, Bobby.

BOBBY. Bless you, Dots! If she *does*—well! [*He draws a long breath, folds his note, turns down one corner and writes under it.* DOROTHY, *who has been watching from a distance, says*]:

DOROTHY. I know what you wrote there under that folded corner.

BOBBY [*Laughing*]. Do you? What?

DOROTHY. To Darling Edith.

BOBBY [*Amazed*]. How did you know?

DOROTHY [*Amused*]. It used to be "To Darling Dolly." [*She laughs; he looks for a moment as though he would tear the note up, thinks better of it and hands it to* DOROTHY.]

BOBBY. You'll see that she gets it?

DOROTHY. I'll put it right here with the coat. [*She does so, pushing both into the muff.*] Now, Bobby, run along quickly and get that hundred. John will be here any minute. Besides the banks will be closed.

BOBBY. Banks closed long ago, child. I'll go to my "Uncle."

DOROTHY. All right! Anywhere—only *get the hundred.* [*She stops to listen.*] There's John now. Oh, Bobby, don't mind if he—if he isn't very cordial, will you. He's never liked me to—to talk about you. [BOBBY *nods comprehendingly and she goes to the hall*

to meet JOHN *who by this time has opened the front door.*] Hello, dear! Home a bit early, aren't you? Come in and see Bobby, he's here.

JOHN [*Entering, hat in hand*]. Good evening, Mr. Lennox. [*Very formal.*] Glad to see you. [*It is easy to see that the two men cordially dislike each other.*]

BOBBY [*Suddenly embarrassed*]. Good evening, sir. I—we—Dorothy—Mrs. Mendon and I just happened to meet—and——

DOROTHY. You'll be late, Bobby. Don't forget the dinner-party. Good-by. [*She hustles him off, runs back into the room, ringing the bell for* KATY.] I'll ring for your tea at once, dearest.

JOHN [*Catching her to him fervently*]. Here, give me a kiss! [*He kisses her several times very tenderly.*] Little curly pate! [*He rumples her hair banteringly.*] Of course, I'm home early. Wanted to have tea with my wife. [*He holds her at arm's length.*] Look at her, stealing——

DOROTHY [*Gasping*]. Stealing!

JOHN [*Laughing and pinching her cheeks*]. Stealing roses for her cheeks. Does it rub off? [*Playfully he rubs her cheek.*]

DOROTHY [*With an effort at calmness*]. Let me go, John. Katy's coming. [*He releases her.* KATY *enters with tea and toast and placing these on the table, takes up the used cups.*]

JOHN [*Sauntering down to the table, and noticing*

for the first time the evidence of teaing]. Hello! Have you had your tea?

DOROTHY. Yes—er—with Bobby. Do you mind?

JOHN. Oh, no, of course not. [*But it is evident that tea is now spoiled for him.*] Well, what has my Dolly girl been doing today? [*He drags the big chair down, pushes away the little one in which* BOBBY *has evidently sat, and seats himself at the table at his wife's right, she upon the sofa.*] Have you been out? You've got such a fine color. [*Katy goes out.*]

DOROTHY [*Busying herself with the tea*]. Yes, I was out for a—walk this afternoon—all the way up and down the avenue. A lovely walk! [*She unconsciously puts two lumps of sugar in his tea and hands it.*]

JOHN. Shopping?

DOROTHY. No, no, dear, just walking. Wasn't it a lovely day—or—oh, no, I forgot the fog. Horrid day, wasn't it?

JOHN [*Looking at her in surprise*]. Why, what— [*By this time he has tasted his tea and sets it down abruptly.*] You've put sugar in my tea.

DOROTHY [*Overcome with embarrassment*]. Oh, pardon me, dearest! So sorry! I forgot. Here, let me change it. [*She pours another cup and hands it to him while he watches her closely.*] Have some toast! Katy does make such good toast, doesn't she?

JOHN [*Force of habit—checking up on people*]. Yes. Did you pay her today?

DOROTHY [*Thrown into a panic*]. Yes, oh, yes—of course!

JOHN. What in the world are you so nervous about? See how your hand is shaking.

DOROTHY. Nonsense! You imagine it. Let me get your cigarettes. [*She gets up and runs across the room, and up to the table by* JOHN'S *door, where she gets cigarettes, ash-tray and matches. She tries to hum gaily during this. She stops for a moment behind the screen to steady herself, but, as she lifts her head toward the mirror, she catches her husband's eye there. She forces a smile, throws him a kiss in the mirror, and comes forward with the smoking things.*] Have you quite finished? Won't you have a chocolate cake?

JOHN. No, thank you. I loathe chocolate cake.

DOROTHY [*Gallantly*]. Then have a cigarette—do! I'll light it for you. [*She does so daintily.*]

JOHN [*Watching her*]. I'm glad you don't smoke, Dorothy. Horrid habit for a woman—Edith, for instance, smokes like a chimney. If she belonged to me I shouldn't allow it.

DOROTHY [*Finishing the lighting, kissing the tip and putting it between his lips*]. There—horrid monster!

JOHN [*Catching and kissing her hand*]. Hello! Dear, your hands are like ice. What's the matter? Does seeing old friends upset you so? [*He still holds her hands and regards her closely but kindly.*]

DOROTHY. Who? Bobby? No, indeed! Why should—why, of course—he's only Bobby, you know.

JOHN [*Holding her hands closely*]. "Only Bobby!" Hang Bobby! [*He releases her.*] I could find it in my heart to wish there never had been a "Bobby." How did he happen to come here to tea?

DOROTHY [*Breaking away and going to the fire*]. Oh, I was out walking——

JOHN. Yes, you've already said you were out walking.

DOROTHY [*Nervously*]. Yes, I *was* out walking and I stopped in at Edith Chester's, and it seems she is going to the Langdon's dinner tonight, too; so I told her just to run in whenever she was ready, and we'd take her with us.

JOHN. Humm! [*There is a pause.*] Was it at Edith's that you met Mr. Lennox?

DOROTHY. Bobby?—yes—no—I don't know—that is—I met Bobby just at the foot of our steps as I was coming in.

JOHN [*Cold as ice*]. Indeed! What was Mr. Lennox doing at the foot of our steps?

DOROTHY. Doing? Why—he—he was—just—out walking. [*The bell rings.* DOROTHY *goes quickly across the room.*] Dear me! Who can *that* be, I wonder! No one to call, I hope, for I'm not dressed for the dinner, yet, and I have my hair to curl. [*By this time* KATY *has opened the front door and* EDITH *comes quickly into the room.* JOHN *rises, and* DORO-

THY *runs to meet her, evidently relieved.*] Edith, dear! I'm so glad it's you! [*Kissing her.*] Do come and have some tea.

EDITH [*Calmly*]. No, thank you; had it. [*She shakes hands with* JOHN.] Like a cigarette, though, if John has one to spare.

JOHN [*Offering his case*]. Delighted! [*They each take one and* JOHN *strikes a match and holds it for her and then lights his own.*] Glad we are to have the pleasure of taking you with us to the Landon's dinner tonight.

EDITH. Thank you! [*She inhales her cigarette smoke, man-fashion.*] Just dropped in to see what Dorothy is going to wear tonight.

DOROTHY. Wear? [*She laughs nervously.*] Why, I don't know—I——

JOHN. Wear your blue velvet and pearls, of course.

DOROTHY. Oh, do you think so? I thought I'd— [*She catches her husband's eye and wilts.*] Very well, dear. [*To* EDITH.] I wonder if you'll mind, Edith, if I run away to dress. My hair takes forever. You'll entertain John, won't you?

EDITH [*She has watched this bit of authority with a quizzical expression*]. Certainly, dear child! Run along! John and I will have a smoke together. [DOROTHY *makes a grateful escape,* EDITH *seats herself at the piano and runs her fingers softly over the keys, smoking lazily the while, and watching* JOHN *from the corner of her eye as he paces to and fro, smoking fiercely at a black cigar, which he has substi-*

tuted for the cigarette. At last she stops abruptly and, turning on the stool, faces him.] What is it, John?

JOHN. Nothing. [*He continues to pace.*]

EDITH [*Rising from the piano and going to him*]. Give me another cigarette. [*He does so and she lights it at his cigar.*] Your very last? Thank you. See here, John, [*She looks him in the eye*] don't talk nonsense. You look like a colonel about to order a charge. Remember, John, married life isn't a battlefield. [JOHN *snorts, whirls, and paces away from her. She blows smoke rings and watches him.*] Do you know what *I* think is the matter?

JOHN [*Reluctantly*]. No.

EDITH. I think you drive Dorothy with too short a rein. [JOHN *snorts again and flings away from her, but she continues.*] You've got a heavy hand, John —very heavy; and she's just a filly, you know.

JOHN. You don't know anything about it, Edith; you've never been in love.

EDITH. Oh, haven't I?

JOHN [*Surprised out of himself*]. You *have* been?

EDITH [*Still calmly blowing smoke*]. I *am*.

JOHN. Ah! might I ask——

EDITH [*Still calm*]. Bobby Lennox.

JOHN. *Bobby Lennox!*

EDITH. The same. I mean to marry Bobby.

JOHN [*Drawing a long breath of relief and coming to meet her*]. Edith! I congratulate you and wish you joy with all my heart. May your marriage bring

you the wonderful joy mine has brought me! [*He shakes her hand.*] Sorry I didn't know it a bit earlier. I should like to congratulate him.

EDITH [*Quite soberly*]. Oh, Bobby doesn't know it yet.

JOHN. No? [*Bowled over, he laughs.*] That's good! Come over here, Edith, on this couch, and tell me about it. [*They sit.*] Well?

EDITH. Of course I'd known Bobby for years in the old days when he used to rush your wife. [*She looks at* JOHN *closely.*] You knew he used to rush your wife? [JOHN *nods.*] I paid very little attention to him then,—used to think him effeminate. Ha! *Effeminate!* [*She smokes in silence for a moment, staring into the past, then comes back with a jerk.*]. Then came the war, and Bobby went over with the very first—long before we went in. I liked him for that.

JOHN. And I.

EDITH. Well, I took training and finally got over as a nurse. It was there I got really to know Bobby.

JOHN. He made good at it, didn't he?

EDITH. Made good! Rather! His men adored him. And gay! Gay as though he were leading a ball.

JOHN. Gad! How I envy him!

EDITH. You shouldn't. You got his lady. She refused him flat before he went over. He told me so when he "got his"—a nasty one, too. He was in my ward then—just my own little boy. You see, John,

you and I are plain hum-drum folk. But Dorothy and Bobby and their like are the star-dust, the *élan, la joie-de-vivre.* It's enough if a little of their happiness spills over on us.

JOHN [*Much moved*]. I—I'm glad you told me, Edith. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I've always been a little bit jealous of Lennox. Jealous of you all—young and gay together. I never had that. You make me feel like an old man. [*He comes restlessly to the fire.*] Sometimes I hate you all for being so young and gay. Just here, a few moments ago, I wanted to wring his confounded neck.

EDITH. Whose?

JOHN. Your Bobby's.

EDITH. Bobby *here?*

JOHN. You didn't know? [*A bit of suspicion creeps back again into his face.*] Ha! You'd better keep your eye on him.

EDITH [*Rising slowly and throwing her cigarette butt into the fire decisively.*] Never! No, *I* shan't make that mistake with Bobby.

JOHN. No? What will you do?

EDITH. I'll give him his head. Why not try it with Dorothy, John? Why *did* you marry her, anyway?

JOHN [*Emotionally*]. Why? Because she is the most beautiful, fascinating, charming, lovable, adorable little thing in the world. She has become the fragrance of my life.

EDITH. Precisely. She's like that rose over there, a lovely thing in a fragile vase, but easily broken, John —oh! *so* easily broken.

JOHN. She's perfect.

EDITH. Then why are you always trying to change her?

JOHN. Eh? *Change* her? No!

EDITH. Yes, you're always trying to make her over on your pattern. Why not let her be herself?

JOHN. But I do——

EDITH [*Mimicking*]. "Wear your blue velvet and pearls." Eh? [*She pokes at him, banteringly.*]

JOHN. By Jove, Edith, you're right—dead right! [*Thoughtfully.*] Only this morning she asked for a Mandarin coat she admires over here at Wang Lee's, and I said "No."

EDITH. You see! Why shouldn't she have it?

JOHN. It isn't her style, Edith, she should wear dainty, French, feminine things. I——

EDITH [*Scornfully*]. Oh, *you! You! You!* Let her be *her* for a minute.

JOHN [*Newly determined*]. I will! I'll go buy it for her now.

EDITH. Good! [*She looks at her wrist watch.*] Jove! I shall be late dressing. Must run along and doll up. I mean to ask him tonight, John.

JOHN [*Amused*]. Why not make him ask you? Women always can.

EDITH. He's too much afraid of my damn money. [JOHN *laughs.*] Oh, I know he wants me. He al-

most asked me—over there. Coming along with me on your shopping tour? [*She starts toward the door.*]

JOHN [*Going with her*]. No, I'll let you out, and then run through my library door and the garden—it's the quickest way. You're not afraid alone?

EDITH [*Laughing*]. Next door? Afraid? Hardly! So long, John! Leave the door off the latch so I can come in without ringing.

JOHN. I will. So long, Edith! [*He sees her off. As they go out into the hall* KATY *enters to get the tea things. She goes to the window and draws the curtains, then goes to the table with her tray. In a moment,* JOHN *re-enters from the front door, picks up his hat, and is about to cross the room to the library when she speaks.*]

KATY. Please, Mr. Mendon, sir, I hate to trouble you, sir, but could I please have my month's wages to-night or tomorrow morning? I have to be paying my life insurance to-morrow, sir, and——

JOHN [*Amazed*]. Your wages, Katy! But didn't Mrs. Mendon pay you today?

KATY. No, sir, she didn't, sir.

JOHN [*Recovering*]. Sure enough, Katy, I forgot to give it to her. [*He takes his bill-folder from his pocket.*] Let's see. One hundred dollars, isn't it, Katy?

KATY. Yes, sir. It is, sir.

JOHN [*Handing her a crisp bill*]. There it is. [*He puts back his folder.*]

KATY. Thank'ee, sir. [*She puts the bill carefully in her pocket and goes on collecting the dishes. He hesitates a moment, looks as if he would like to question* KATY, *decides not, picks up his hat, and starts for the library door. At the screen he turns to speak to* KATY.]

JOHN. I'm just running out on an errand, Katy. If your mistress asks for me, tell her I'll be back in ten minutes.

KATY. Yes, sir. I will, sir. [*John goes out.* KATY *finishes the clearing of the tea-table and is about to go with the tray when, with a rush,* DOROTHY *enters, in evening dress.*]

DOROTHY. Where is Mr. Mendon, Katy?

KATY. He just went out the garden way, ma'am. He said to tell you he'd be back in ten minutes, ma'am.

DOROTHY [*Showing relief and suppressed excitement*]. Katy, you'll be busy with the tea things for a bit. If any one comes, I'll answer the bell myself. You needn't come.

KATY. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. [KATY *goes out.*]

[DOROTHY *shows great nervousness. She busies herself straightening the room, looks at the clock, goes to the window and peers through the curtains, goes and pokes the fire, looks again at the clock, peers again through the curtains, goes to the piano and, seating herself, tries to play a gay little tune, but finally breaks down utterly and drops her head on her arms on the*

front edge of the music-rack. At the moment when she seats herself and begins to play, JOHN *softly opens the door and enters with a package in his hands. He listens an instant to the music, and softly lays the package and his hat down on the table. He turns and and comes forward to the front edge of the screen, and stands there looking at his wife's reflection in the mantel mirror, his expression one of loving admiration. When she stops suddenly and drops her head, he is full of concern and is about to go forward to her, when she suddenly jumps from the piano stool and rushes again to the window, peering anxiously out into the night. At this,* JOHN'S *expression changes to dawning suspicion, and from this on, he shows the swift evolution of jealousy and anger. She evidently sees without what she has been looking for, and rushes to the front door. She opens it, and excited whispering is heard in the hall. In an instant,* DOROTHY *and* BOBBY *enter, talking rapidly in undertones.* BOBBY *is in dinner dress.*]

DOROTHY. Oh, Bobby, Bobby, dear, did you get it? Did you? Did you?

BOBBY. Yes, Dots, I did.

DOROTHY. Thank Heaven! John need never know.

BOBBY. Are you sure, Dolly girl, it wouldn't be better to have made a clean breast of it? Surely he wouldn't hold you——

DOROTHY. No, no, you don't know John.

BOBBY. But you can't go on deceiving him——

DOROTHY. Hush, Bobby, don't argue. This is the

only way. Oh, I've been so unhappy! So unhappy! [*She weeps on* BOBBY's *shoulder.*]

BOBBY. There, there, dear girl, brace up. It shall be as you say, of course, only I always *hate* things on the sly.

DOROTHY. But the money—the money—I must have the money to-night.

BOBBY [*Going into his pocket and hauling out a handful of dirty bills.*] Here it is. [*They count it, heads together, and whispering the count.*]

BOBBY. There! There's that.

DOROTHY. One hundred—oh, Bobby!

BOBBY. Now, Dolly, about the other—you still think we should go through with it—tonight?

DOROTHY. Yes, yes, we *must.* Don't back out now, Bobby.

BOBBY. Back out! "Oh, that thou did'st know how many fathoms deep I am in love!" Don't fail me, Dolly.

DOROTHY. No, Bobby, this time I will not fail you. Go, now; go quickly. John may be back any minute. [*She hurries him off into the hall, the front door is heard to open and close and* DOROTHY *returns with her hands full of the soiled bills.* JOHN *is watching her reflection intently, menacingly. When she reaches the center of the room, he steps out from behind the screen in time to face her at center. They stand a moment, looking into each other's eyes, he as hard as nails; she struck faint with terror. She recoils.*]

DOROTHY [*Gasping*]. John!

JOHN. Where did you get that money?

DOROTHY. Why—you gave me——

JOHN. That filth—I! Where did you get that money?

DOROTHY [*Falteringly*]. I—I saved it.

JOHN. Saved! You! Ha! Why do you tell me lies?

DOROTHY [*Falteringly*]. Lies?

JOHN. Where is the bill I gave you this morning?

DOROTHY [*In a panic*]. I—I—lost it.

JOHN. More lies! You "must have money—money," eh? Tell me the truth. What did you do with it?

DOROTHY. I—I spent it.

JOHN. Ah? For what?

DOROTHY. A—Mandarin coat.

JOHN [*Unbelieving*]. Where is it?

DOROTHY [*Pointing*]. There—in my muff.

JOHN [*Striding to the piano and jerking the coat from the muff*]. This? Never! *He* bought this? [DOROTHY *can only nod acquiescence.*] *He* buys you coats—*he* meets you on the sly—he gives you money—what for?

DOROTHY. For—for the coat.

JOHN. Why is he giving *you* a coat—money—*anything?* What are your relations with this man? Tell me the truth.

DOROTHY [*For the first time sensing that there is more in this than just stolen money*]. Why, John! What do you mean, John?

JOHN. I mean to know the truth—this coat—the need for all this money—What is it you are planning to do—run off with him?

DOROTHY [*Horrified*]. No, no, no, no! Oh, John, no! You don't understand.

JOHN. I mean to before I get through. I understand that I am being made a fool of [*He holds out the coat angrily*] and for a thing like *this*. Faugh! [*He throws it from him on the floor, so that it falls not too far from the entrance to the hall. As it falls, the note, which has been in its folds, falls in plain view. They both see it and she starts for it.*] Leave that alone. [*She stops and draws back shaken, he, still eyeing her, picks it up, and stands with it in his hand, not looking at it, but at her.*]

DOROTHY [*Incoherent*]. John, John, listen to me—listen! It's the coat—you remember—I was out walking—it was the auctioneer. I didn't mean—no, that's not true—I—oh—why did I do it!—Why did I do it!

JOHN [*Bitingly*]. Do what?

DOROTHY. Then the money—I *had* to have the money—I was so frightened—I—I remembered Bobby's pearl—he—oh, Bobby is *so* good to me. [*She breaks down.*]

JOHN. Good to you! Damn him! Good! So he gives you money—and writes you love-letters. [*He indicates the bit of folded paper.*]

DOROTHY. No! No, no, no!

JOHN [*Still eyeing her menacingly, unfolds the paper and, letting his eye fall upon the open page, he reads, more to himself than to her*]. "Darling: [*A spasm of pain contracts* JOHN'S *features. He takes a moment to command himself before going on.*] I dare not tell you how much I love—" [JOHN *makes a smothered exclamation and reads on silently for an instant.*] The cur!—Hound!—Damn him!—"I do not ask—I have no *right* to ask for your love in return, but if you are willing to give me a little encouragement, wear this coat at the Langdon's dinner tonight." [*He looks up at* DOROTHY, *understanding, as he thinks, the whole situation.*]

DOROTHY [*Struggling to be articulate*]. No—no! It's—it's Edith—[EDITH, *in dinner dress, enters from the hall in a rush.*]

EDITH. Hello! Hope I'm not late. Left the door open for Bobby. He's coming. [*She stops, confronted by what she sees is a tense situation. She sees the Mandarin coat on the floor at her feet and picks it up.*] Hello! What a way to treat a Mandarin coat! Whose is it?

DOROTHY. Yours.

EDITH. Mine? From whom? [JOHN *turns away angrily.*]

DOROTHY. Bobby.

JOHN [*Turning back*]. Edith, she is lying to you. Your precious "Bobby" bought it for *her.*

DOROTHY. Edith, he bought it for *you.* [EDITH

looks from one to the other and slowly puts on the coat.] God bless you, Edith, for that! My husband has Bobby's note to you, also. Ask him for it.

JOHN [*As* EDITH *slowly holds out her hand to him*]. She's tricking us, Edith. [*He turns upon* DOROTHY.] If it's for *her*, prove it.

DOROTHY [*Slowly*]. Her—name—is—under the flap. [JOHN *looks, his whole face changes, he hands the note to* EDITH *in a dazed fashion, and looks at his wife, who refuses to meet his gaze.*]

JOHN. I—beg your pardon. [*He turns away.* BOBBY *bursts in through the hall, in high hat and evening overcoat.*]

BOBBY. I say, everybody, you'll all be late for dinner. [*He sees* EDITH *with his coat on and is at once unconscious of all else.*] Edith! Edith! You accept it—and me? Darling! [*He starts toward her. The others turn their backs.*]

EDITH [*Holding up the note*]. I've not read your note yet, Bobby. Does it by any chance ask me to marry you?

BOBBY. Oh, Edith, will you—will you?

EDITH. Like a shot, Bobby! [*She throws herself into his arms.*] We'll announce it at the dinner tonight. Dorothy, congratulate us.

DOROTHY [*Making a great effort*]. I—I do, Edith, with all my heart. Bobby's true blue. You're lucky. [*She kisses* EDITH *and shakes* BOBBY *by both hands.*]

BOBBY. Dots, old girl, I'd never have dared but for you. You're a bully old dear!

DOROTHY. That's all right, Bobby. [*She glances across to her husband who is at the fireplace.*] John wants to congratulate you, too.

JOHN [*Coming forward and shaking Bobby's hand very hard*]. I do congratulate you. I wish you every happiness. [*He turns away abruptly.*]

DOROTHY. Now you two run along to the dinner. Tell Mrs. Langdon I'm—I'm not feeling—up to it. Sorry! [BOBBY *starts to protest:* "Oh, I say—" [*but is hustled off by* EDITH, *who turns at the door.*]

EDITH. *Do* try to come, even if you're late. I want you there when we announce our engagement. I'll send the motor back for you. Au revoir! [*They go out.*]

[*There is a pause.* JOHN *stands before the fire, looking into it.* DOROTHY *comes slowly down back of the sofa.* JOHN *turns and holds out his hands to her.*]

JOHN [*Pleadingly*]. Dorothy!

DOROTHY. Yes, John.

JOHN [*Starting toward her*]. My darling!

DOROTHY. No—wait! [*She struggles for self-control.*] I—I have something to say—and—and—it's difficult.

JOHN. Ah! You don't forgive me, then!

DOROTHY. Yes, John, I do—I do! But—I've been growing up, John, in the last hour or two, and the growing pains—hurt. [*He groans and turns to the fire.*] You see, John dear, I never knew myself until tonight, and I'm—humiliated.

JOHN. It is I who——

DOROTHY. Let me say it. I have lied, and cheated, and stolen; and all because I was so afraid of you, John—my husband. [*He turns protestingly.*] I'm not lying now, John, *this*, at least, is the truth.

JOHN. You did a generous thing, and brought two lovers together.

DOROTHY. No, John, let me be honest this time. I *made* Bobby buy that coat against his better judgment, just to save my own miserable skin. There was nothing generous about it. I was a coward.

JOHN. Dorothy!

DOROTHY. There it is, John! That's where my love for you has brought me. I've been so anxious to make you keep on loving me—so afraid you'd find out what a rattle-brained thing I am, that I've tried to make myself over to please you. I can't do it, John—I can't. I'm just me.

JOHN. Darling!

DOROTHY. I can't go on pretending to be what I'm not, John. You're making a liar out of me—a liar, and a coward, because I'm so afraid of you. John, there's not room for both love and fear between husband and wife. It's either the one or the other. Which shall it be, John?

JOHN. Dorothy! [*She runs to him and he gathers her in a long embrace.*] Darling child, I'd not change you—no, not one iota.

DOROTHY [*Softly*]. I'm sorry I stole the money, John, but it *was* a pretty coat, wasn't it? Say it was! Please!

JOHN [*Suddenly remembering*]. By Jove! I was forgetting! [*He rushes and gets the coat he has brought in. It is a truly magnificent coat which pales the other into insignificance. He throws it about his wife's shoulders.*] There! Your own Mandarin coat, Madam. [*He stands back and regards the effect.*] By Jupiter! You're lovely in it. It *is* your style, after all. I was mistaken.

DOROTHY [*In raptures*]. Mistaken? *You*, John! *Mistaken?* Thank Heaven! [*She kisses him.*] John, I shall never be afraid of you again!

CURTAIN

THE SPONGE [1]

A Comedy

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CHARACTERS

Nina Aristo, 40, celebrated singer. Widow of noted Italian teacher of voice,—herself American born.

Katharine, 20, her daughter.

Ralph Forrester, 25, Nina's concert-accompanist for the past five years.

Alfredo Frascati, 30, composer and pianist.

Bettina, 50, maid, brought by Nina from Italy after long years of service there.

THE SPONGE

TIME: *The present.*

PLACE: *New York City.*

SCENE: *A handsomely appointed room in a furnished Studio-apartment. In the back wall, beginning right, is first the entrance door, then a grand piano, with its straight side running along the wall and its keyboard at right-angles to the wall, then the door to the service part of the apartment. In the right-hand wall is a bank of windows and, down front, a telephone. In the left wall, beginning up stage, are: the door to Katharine's room, a fireplace with fire, and down front, the door to Nina's room. A tea-table and easy chairs are before the fire. The room has, added to its conventional furnishings, many rare and beautiful things such as a traveled and luxurious woman might take about with her. This lends a touch of the exotic to what is inclined to be rather Grand Rapids-y. It is about four o'clock of an afternoon in late October.*

The rise of the curtain is preceded by piano-playing. RALPH *is discovered at the piano, while* KATHARINE *busies herself at the tea-table.* RALPH *ends a brilliant passage and rises from the piano-bench.*

RALPH. Katharine?

KATHARINE. Yes, Ralph?

RALPH. When are you going to marry me?

KATHARINE. Hush! Bettina will hear you.

RALPH. Let her! I'll tell the world we're in love.

KATHARINE [*Trying to silence him*]. Sssh! She'll tell Mother—she tells her everything.

RALPH. Her devoted slave for fifteen years. You should have seen her the night of Nina's opera début, and your father too—off their heads. Only Nina was calm. The house went mad that night.

KATHARINE. It makes my heart beat just to think of it. My father—you—you knew him?

RALPH. But yes. It was he engaged me for her accompanist. He too was a devoted slave. Don't you remember him?

KATHARINE [*Shaking her head*]. No. I was only a baby when they sent me back to Aunt Mary to raise. I missed having a family. Poor old Bettina! She misses her grand-children,—it's quite a sacrifice.

RALPH. Your mother believes in sacrifice,—for other people. But you're dodging the question: when are you going to marry me? [*He comes down to her.*]

KATHARINE. Oh! Ralph, I'm so afraid that Moth —that Nina won't like it.

RALPH. She makes you call her "Nina"?

KATHARINE [*Resenting his implied criticism*]. I don't blame her. She looks as young as I,—or younger, in spite of her forty years. A twenty-year old daughter is nothing short of an affliction, with her

career to think of. A prima donna must not grow old, or she loses her public.

RALPH. And so, for the sake of the dear Public, you must call your mother, "Nina."

KATHARINE. Why not? I don't mind,—any more.

RALPH. It's suitable enough. She never *was* a mother to you. How long have you really known her?

KATHARINE. Just these last two months.

RALPH. Since she and I returned from Italy? No longer than you've known *me*, Katharine.

KATHARINE. I think I've known *you* always, Ralph.

RALPH [*Kissing her*]. My darling! I love you so much I resent her neglect of you—all those years without a mother!

KATHARINE. Oh! Aunt Mary was like a mother to me. She had a mother's heart in spite of her prim, New England ways. Surely it was better for me to have had a straight-laced American upbringing than to have been snatched from pillar to post all over Europe while M—while Nina was establishing her career.

RALPH. Hum! Perhaps—but—if *you* had a baby, all your own, would *you* give it up for a career?

KATHARINE [*Embarrassed*]. Oh, no! No—no—no! But then, I'm not a prima donna.

RALPH. Thank Heaven! No prima donna but my sweetheart—when will it be—my *wife*, dearest?

KATHARINE. Some day, Ralph, some day; but aren't we happy enough now, just as we are?

RALPH. I'm not.

KATHARINE [*Alarmed*]. Not happy? Oh! Why not?

RALPH. You'll be angry—you always are if I criticize Nina, but—the truth is, I'm through.

KATHARINE. Through?

RALPH. No more touring the world as concert pianist for "The Aristo." I want to marry and settle down, with a home of my own—and you in it—YOU.

KATHARINE. But—to give up your career,—for it *is* a career to be a great accompanist, just for *me!* You'd miss Nina so. I've heard you say it was an education to play for her.

RALPH. It *is*. It has been. She's taught me everything these last five years.

KATHARINE. And now the critics say you are the "world's greatest accompanist"— You should love to play for her.

RALPH. I do, as an artist. It's a thrilling thing to merge the song of the piano into the glory that is her voice. But—I—it's hard to explain but—she just soaks me up.

KATHARINE. Soaks you up?

RALPH. Like a sponge. She does everybody. Your father gave up his life to developing her voice, Bettina gives up her family to serve her, and now—you and I.

KATHARINE. Nonsense! She's not soaking *me* up. I just *love* to do things for her.

RALPH. That's it! That's the method. She has

a way of making everybody "just love to do things for her," till finally they aren't living their own lives, at all—just hers. She absorbs their time, their interests, their talents, their art,—their very lives.

KATHARINE. Hush! hush! it is disloyal——

RALPH. Disloyal! No. Rather is it disloyal to you to allow our love for each other to be so absorbed. That belongs to us, Katharine, just to us. We must not lose it. You do love me, dear,—say that you do!

KATHARINE. I do, Ralph, I do!

RALPH. Then say that you'll marry me—soon—soon!

KATHARINE [*Troubled*]. But—if you give up being accompanist—how can we afford——?

RALPH. Oh! I've saved money. Nina has always been generous,—besides, I've an offer.

KATHARINE. An offer? To leave Nina? What?

RALPH. Lynn & Morrow. They offer me a fine position in their demonstration work—and a chance for the future.

KATHARINE. Lynn & Morrow! But they've been such friends with Nina. She'll be so angry——

RALPH. She'll raise hell—I beg your pardon—but she will—be mighty unpleasant. I know it will be painful for you, but if you love me——

KATHARINE. Yes, yes—but——

[*The door-bell rings and the lovers part, he going to the piano and she to the tea-table.* BETTINA *comes in from the kitchen and goes to the door. As she opens,* ALFREDO *is seen in the doorway.*]

ALFREDO. Good afternoon! Does Madame Aristo live here?

BETTINA. Si, Signor, Madame——

RALPH [*Going to the door,* BETTINA *goes back to her kitchen*]. Alfredo! Upon my word! Who thought to see you in America! Come in! [*He drags him in and closes the door.*] When did you come to New York? I thought you were in Rome.

ALFREDO. Ah! Rome! You love her still, my friend, not so?

RALPH. Adore her! And to hear you speak English! I did not know you knew it.

ALFREDO. But I was born in New York, my friend, in Little Italy. Ah! this young America—she is our step-mother,—our beloved step-mother. [*He pauses looking inquiringly at* KATHARINE.]

RALPH. Forgive me! I forgot my manners in my surprise at seeing you here. Katharine, this is a friend whom I knew many years in Rome, Mr. Alfredo Frascati. Dodo, this is Miss Katharine Aristo.

ALFREDO [*As they bow*]. Sister of Signora Aristo? I am charmed to meet the Signorina. [*He bows again over her hand.*]

KATHARINE [*Laughing*]. She does look young enough to be my sister, but—I'm her daughter, Signor. You see, Mamma married very young.

ALFREDO. The Aristo could never be anything but young. Her voice—her golden voice—I worship it, Signorita. It is the dream of my life to hear it in my song.

KATHARINE. Your song? You are then a composer?

RALPH. He won a prix de Rome, and was studying there all the time I knew him. Let's see your song, old fellow.

ALFREDO [*Taking Ms. from case and giving it to* RALPH]. It is my masterpiece. If only The Aristo would sing it, my fame would be secure. Do you think you could persuade her to look at it, my friend?

RALPH [*Taking the Ms. and looking at it*]. Perhaps—some day. Nina is very temperamental—one cannot promise..

ALFREDO [*To* KATHARINE]. If the Signorina would be so good as to try——?

RALPH [*Annoyed by this appeal to* KATHARINE]. I'll do my best, old fellow. Where are you stopping?

ALFREDO. In this same building. Studio No. 40.

RALPH. Ha! All neighbors, eh? I've Studio No. 45 myself. [*Listens.*] Hark! I hear the elevator door. Perhaps—yes—it *is* The Aristo. [*He goes to the door and opens.*]

NINA [*Entering like a whirlwind*]. Brrr! Such a place! Such a climate! I'm chilled to the bone—to the very marrow! Schrechlich! As well sandpaper a voice! [*She stops suddenly in front of* ALFREDO, *whom she has just discovered.*] Who is this? A reporter? Haven't I told you I won't see reporters?

KATHARINE. This is Mr. Alfredo Frascati, Mamma, who——

NINA [*Throwing herself toward the fire*]. No—no! I won't meet him. I won't meet any one, I tell you. [ALFREDO *makes a quick and discreet exit, pantomiming* RALPH *to keep the song and show it if possible. Exits* ALFREDO, RALPH *closes door.*] How many times must I tell you! Sapristi! How stupid!

KATHARINE. But, Mamma——

NINA [*Mimicking*]. Mamma—mamma—mamma! Stop it, I tell you! Shouting from the house-tops that I'm old—old! Madre Dios! You are older than I am this minute. [*She takes off her hat and throws it to* KATHARINE.] Brrr! My fingers are icicles! [*She jerks off her gloves and throws them to* RALPH.] [*Calls.*] Bettina! Bettina! [*To* RALPH.] *You—you* trying to introduce me to a man —a *young* man with my nose fairly purple with the cold. I'm surprised, Beppo. What will he tell about "The Aristo!" [*Shouts.*] Bettina! Bettina! Where is the beast? Bettina!

BETTINA [*Rushing in, all smiles*]. Si, Signora—Signora, mia, I come. Thy Bettina comes. Behold! [*She removes* NINA's *cloak and takes her hat and gloves from the others.*] My poor darling! She is weary—she is cold, the poor little one! Come close to the fire, ma bella, and warm thyself. [*She takes* NINA's *things into* NINA's *room. Exits* BETTINA.]

NINA. Cold! I am frozen—geleé—tout-a-fait geleé, mon Dieu! And my voice—my golden voice,—she is frozen into one long, blue icicle! She will crack, Beppo, mia, she will crack to pieces.

KATHARINE. Come to your room and put on a wrapper——

NINA [*Bursting into laughter*]. A wrapper! Mon Dieu! she calls my lovely robe-de-chambre a "wrapper." Tiens, my little New England nun, the "wrapper" is a good idea.

KATHARINE [*Starting toward* NINA'S *door*]. Then come and I will——

NINA [*Laughing*]. Come? Would you freeze me in that cold room? Here—bring it here, chérie, bring it here—bring it *here!* Mais depêches-toi, mon enfant! [*She waves* KATHARINE *through the door and turning to the fire, spreads out her hands to the blaze, laughing.*] The little idiot, with her New England ways,—she is rather nice, eh, Beppo, mia?

BETTINA [*Entering from* NINA'S *room with a lovely shawl*]. Behold, my darling, how this shall make thee warm. [*She spreads it on the easy-chair before the fire.*] Bask here, my kitten, and old Bettine will bring the tea, quickly.

NINA [*Patting her softly*]. And seed-cakes, Bettina?

BETTINA. And seed-cakes, my darling. I fly! [BETTINA *exits hastily to the kitchen.*]

NINA [*Glancing over her shoulder at* RALPH, *who has been looking at the Ms.*]. Tiens, Beppo, darling, what have you there?

RALPH [*Coldly*]. My name is Ralph.

NINA [*Surprised, then laughing*]. Tiens—tiens—tiens! Think of that, now. I call him Beppo for

years and years and years—and suddenly, his name is Ralph. Eh bien, Ralph! what have you there? Come here to your Nina [*He goes reluctantly*]. My hands—my poor frozen hands, Beppo. Rub them—rub them warm!

RALPH [*Reluctantly rubbing*]. Why didn't you take a taxi? Where have you been, anyway?

NINA [*Caressingly*]. Do not scold your poor Nina. Where have I been? To see that old beast The Marcheso. Oh! I hate him—I hate him—I hate him! [*She begins to cry aloud.*]

RALPH [*Authoritatively*]. Hush! Be quiet,—you'll hurt your voice. [*She stops with the obedience of a little child.*] What has The Marcheso done?

NINA [*Trying not to weep*]. He's—he's trying to break my contract. Wants to send me to California, instead of Florida, the old villain! [*Cries again.*] I won't go—I tell you I won't go-o-o-o-o!

RALPH. Stop, Nina, you'll ruin your voice, child. California is all right.

NINA [*Angry*]. What! And he's giving my Atlantic coast dates to that old fossil, The Christobella. She can't sing—you know she can't. She's fifty if she's a day. Oh-o-o-o! He thinks he can put me off with any old thing. Don't rub my hands so—stop! You make me nervous! Oh! I'm so hot, I'm melting! This gown—it chokes me! Unhook it—quick—quick! [RALPH *begins to unhook with accustomed fingers.* KATHARINE *re-enters from her mother's room with the*

robe-de-chambre, a gorgeous affair. She is shocked to see RALPH *so engaged.*]

RALPH. There, there! Quiet now! Remember the voice. [*She tries her voice softly as he unhooks.*]

KATHARINE [*Rather primly*]. I'll finish, please. [RALPH *goes back to the Ms. on the piano and* KATHARINE *deftly helps* NINA *to change.*] There, dear, now sit down and let me change your shoes for these slippers. [*She holds up some frivolous mules.* NINA *seats herself and* KATHARINE *changes for her. She then carries* NINA'S *things to her room and re-enters.*]

NINA [*Still to* RALPH]. I told him I wouldn't go—not at any price. The beast,—giving The Christobella all the cream! She—why, she weighs 190 pounds at the very least and wears her clothes like a scrub-woman. Have you heard her in Samson? Oh-la-la-la! She'd never get the hair off any one's head. She shan't have my dates, I tell you, she— (BETTINA *enters with the tea-tray.* NINA'S *expression changes like lightning.*] Ah! at last, thou slow-footed one! What hast thou for thy beloved? Seed-cakes! Ah, Tina, I give thee a million kisses! [*She blows one to* BETTINA, *who is beaming as she places and arranges the tray and serves her mistress.*]

BETTINA. Ah! ma bella donna! See, the tea is hot as thou dost require it, and——

NINA [*Greedily*]. And the cakes?

BETTINA [*Serving her*]. The little cakes thou lovest best, my kitten. Behold them!

NINA [*Stroking* BETTINA *and almost purring*]. Ah! my beloved cakes! mes jolies petits gâteaux! Ah! Bettina—good old Bettina, thou lovest me?

BETTINA [*Solemnly*]. Better than life, ma bella donna! One sugar?

NINA. Oh, Bettina, two—please, two!

BETTINA [*Shaking her head sadly*]. The voice—bella donna, the voice!

NINA [*Pouting*]. Well, one then—but make it a big one. [BETTINA *puts in a big lump.*] Now run along, Bettina, and make the macaroni the way I like it,—with the Parmesan—remember, Bettina.

BETTINA [*Going*]. Si, Signora, si! [*Exits* BETTINA *to the kitchen.*]

NINA [*Stretching like a cat and nibbling at her cakes and tea*]. Heigh-ho! My, but this is good! Almost as good as Rome, eh, my Beppo?

RALPH [*Dryly*]. A better fire I'd say, Nina.

NINA [*Meditating*]. Yes, that is true—but the cakes were better in Rome. And Milano, my Beppo, dost thou remember after my triumph at La Scala how they shouted: La Aristo! La Bella Aristo! and how the crowd dragged my carriage to the hotel afterward? Ah-la-la! [*She stretches her feet to the fire and drinks her tea.*] Kitty, mia, my feet are cold—rub them.

[KATHARINE, *who has served* RALPH *with his tea while* BETTINA *served* NINA, *and who has just poured her own, sets down her cup and, taking off the mules, obediently rubs her mother's feet.*]

RALPH. Katharine, you haven't had your tea. Let me do that.

KATHARINE. No—no! I love to do it.

NINA [*Smiling at her and patting her bent head*]. You are like one of the angels in the Sistine, mon enfant. [*She reaches for another seed-cake,* RALPH *interferes.*]

RALPH [*Sternly*]. No more cake. You'll be as big as The Christobella if you do.

NINA [*Sighing*]. Ah! well! [*To* KATHERINE.] Little do you know the sacrifices an artist must make for her career, little one. Don't rub so! You'll take the skin off! Enough—enough—enough! [KATHARINE *puts the mules on her and rising, takes* RALPH'S *cup and places it on the tray. As she picks up the tray to take it to the kitchen,* NINA *speaks to her.*] Do see to the salad-dressing—a little more garlic.

KATHARINE. Yes, Nina. [*She exits with the tray.*]

NINA. I believe I can make something of her, Beppo; she's almost pretty.

RALPH. Nina, I must talk to you. [*He comes over to her.*]

NINA [*Stretching*]. To think that old idiot, The Marcheso, thought he could do that to me—*me!* He shall go on his knees to me, I tell you; he shall——

RALPH. Nina, listen to me; it's important, what I have to say.

NINA [*Still in her imaginary scene with M.*]. Important! He certainly will find I am the most important——

RALPH [*Firmly*]. This is not a question of you at all, Nina.

NINA. No? Of whom then?

RALPH [*Brutally frank through nerves*]. Of me. I—I want to give up my position as your concert accompanist.

NINA [*Incredulous of her ears*]. Give up—me—you—? [*She bursts into amused laughter.*] Aha—ha-ha! and what does my little Beppo think he would live for then, eh? [*She laughs.*] It is a funny joke, eh?

RALPH. It is no joke. It is a fact, Nina. I've a good offer and I want to settle down. I'm tired of this——

NINA [*Angry*]. Offer? You have an offer? Who is it—that Christobella, eh?

RALPH. No—no, Nina! this is business—straight business. I am tired——

NINA. Ha! Tired! Tired?—tired of what? Of *me?* Gott im Himmel—tired! And *me*—what of me, mon ami? Am I an old shoe to be thrown away? Have I not taught you everything you know—I—The Aristo?

RALPH. Yes, yes, I know—I appreciate——

NINA. Appreciate!—YOU—appreciate! Sacre bleu! I—the greatest diva of them all—I take the trouble to teach you to play accompaniments,—work with you, *slave* with you, spend weeks, and months,—almost *years* teaching you to be a perfect accompanist; [*She paces like a caged tiger*] and then, at the first

little business offer that comes along—Imbecile! What is it you are tired of?

RALPH. You make it so hard—telling you. I *do* know what I owe you as an artist, but——

NINA [*Suddenly sweet*]. La-la-la! 'Tis a tempest in a tea-pot,—is it not so, mon enfant? [*She seats herself comfortably.*] Come, Beppo, mine, come sit on this cushion [*Pointing to one at her feet*] and tell your Nina all about it. [RALPH *walks reluctantly to the fire before her but refuses the cushion.*] No—no cushion? We will not be a good child? So? Eh bien! out with it then. Why art thou weary of thy Nina, mon enfant?

RALPH. I do thank you, Nina, for all you have done for me: your kindness, your interest, your influence in my behalf, your instruction in my art. I do! But for that I should never have been——

NINA [*Smiling up at him sweetly*]. You would never have been the world's greatest accompanist. Voila! Let *me* say it—since it hurts your modesty. It is true. The Christobella would give her eye-teeth to get you away from me. [*Suddenly frightened.*] Tell me—quickly—Beppo, it is not The Christobella?

RALPH. No—no! I've told you so. It's not The Christobella,—it's Lynn and Morrow.

NINA. Lynn and Morrow! A *business* house! But you—you are an artist, my Beppo. [*She laughs.*] You are joking, eh?

RALPH. Hardly.

NINA. You're not? You would use all the art I

have taught you,—all I've labored years to beat into you—you'd use that for a *business*—a great big machine? Impossible! Incredible!

RALPH. I mean to accept.

NINA [*Springing savagely to her feet*]. You shall not, I tell you,—you shall *not!* Sapristi! Do you think I shall let you ruin your life like that? [*Suddenly changing and caressing him.*] Ah, Beppo! my dear, dear Beppo! You are so young—so inexperienced—such a dear, dear boy! It is the way of Youth to want a change. Bien! we shall have it, my Beppo. [*She caresses his cheek with her fingertips, lightly.*] We shall go, after all, to that California,—golden with the sunshine like our dear Italia, and there we shall be happy again, n'est-ce-pas, my Beppo? [*She gives him a push.*] Go—go call Katharine to pack while I phone Marcheso—quick—quick!

RALPH. But——

NINA [*At the phone*]. Go—go, I tell you! [*Into the phone.*] Hello! Hello! Stupid, give me Superior 185—yes, quickly! [RALPH *has gone to the door and opened it on* KATKARINE *who is about to enter. He whispers to her and they stand listening to* NINA *at the phone.*] Hello! Hello! Ah! Maestro, mia, it is thou, thyself, answering? Bravissimo! Know then that it is thy friend Nina, The Aristo, who calls thee. Yes—yes—she would tell thee, dear Master, that she is sorry—so very sorry that she was naughty—naughty—naughty this afternoon—yes—about going to that lovely California—yes. Yes—

yes—tomorrow night? Bien, we shall be ready, Maestro. Adios! [*She hangs up, smiling, and turns to them.*] So! It is all arranged, mes enfants. We shall——

RALPH [*Determined*]. We shall do nothing of the kind. I am not going to California with you, and neither is Katharine. [*He puts his arm about Katharine.*] I am going to marry her and accept the Lynn and Morrow offer.

NINA [*Speechless with amazement*]. MARRY! YOU—marry KATHARINE? You must be crazy.

KATHARINE [*Approaching her mother*]. Do not be angry, darling Mother, we love each other and——

NINA [*Pushing her aside*]. Love! What do *you* know about love? [*She turns on* RALPH, *ignoring* K.] So! This is the real reason for your desertion. Traitors—both of you—traitors to *me*, The Great Aristo—after all I have done for you—after——

RALPH. Stop! It is true you've done much for me,—I grant it freely; but what, pray, have you ever done for your child, except push her off, out of your way?

NINA [*Muttering to herself*]. Perfide! Perfide! [*etc.*]

KATHARINE [*Turning on* RALPH]. Don't, Ralph—it—it hurts! [*To* NINA.] Always I've adored you, darling. Your picture, as Isolde—it hung beside my bed as far back as I can remember. Aunt Mary objected, but I kept it there. I—I said my prayers to it, Mother, dear. I——

NINA. Prayers! Keep your prayers for yourself, little New England nun that you are. Do you realize that you are stealing from me what I cannot replace for months—years? Do you know what it means to train an accompanist, you selfish girl? You——

RALPH. Stop! What has *she* to do with it? This is between you and me—just you and me, Nina.

NINA. Bien! Between you and me—so be it. How long has this been going on?

RALPH. I've loved her from the moment I first saw her. She's—priceless.

NINA [*Looking at* KATHARINE *curiously as though she saw her for the first time*]. Loved *her—her*, with her pale, passionless face and her heart in a strait-jacket! Ha! my Beppo, you are mad—*mad*, I tell you. Voila, mon enfant! With her you shall have a life of dull routine and care, with children—always in the way. Dull—dull as ditch-water. With me—The Great Aristo—you shall have everything. We'll travel the world over. We will go back to Rome—your beloved Rome, chéri, and I will put you on my programs in letters—yes, as large as my own—mine—The Great Aristo. Think of the crowds, the applause—the fame!

KATHARINE [*Gasping*]. Oh, Ralph! the fame!

RALPH [*Putting his arm about her*]. You want me to have it, my dear one? Shall we, then, give up our dream of the little home and just we two in it? Shall we marry and go with Nina——

NINA [*Almost screaming*]. Marry, indeed! Marry! I'm not offering to lug a bride about with us. [*She*

laughs shrilly.] Picture us trotting up and down Europe with nurse-maids and bambinos! Picture the head-lines: The Great Aristo—a grandmother! Ha! It would look well in the headlines, eh? Pah! What do you take me for?

RALPH. But I should be a better accompanist than ever.

NINA. Divide your attentions? Jamais! I must have you thinking always about *me:* Is Nina comfortable, has she dined well, is she amused, is she warm, is her carriage on time? You must think about *me*, wait upon *me*, amuse *me*, take care of *me*, feel proud of *me*. Should you do that with a wife at your coat-tails? Never! [*She snaps her fingers at him.*] *That* for your marriage!

KATHARINE [*Pale and shaken*]. Ralph, dear, it is good-by. I shall never stand in your way—never. I shall not marry you without—her—consent.

RALPH [*To* NINA, *furiously*]. Monster! Monster of selfishness! You shall not spoil our lives—our love.

NINA [*Crying aloud*]. Monster? You—YOU DARE TO CALL ME THAT? TRAITOR! [*She smashes the cup from the mantel upon the hearthstone, where it crashes.*] Perfide! Ingrate! Oh—oh—oh! [*She smashes the saucer, throwing it after the cup.*] Bettina! Bettina! [*She begins to scream and cry.* BETTINA *rushes in from the kitchen and throws her arms about* NINA.] As for YOU—[*To* K.] you have spoiled my life. Never let me see you again—never!

BETTINA. My kitten! my pigeon! bambino, mia!

what have they done to thee? There! there! [*She leads her toward her room.*] Come, thy Bettina will care for thee, my pigeon, my dear one. There! there! [*They exeunt into* NINA'S *room.*]

RALPH. Ridiculous! Scenes—scenes—scenes! Bah! [*He turns to* KATHARINE *who seems turned to stone.*] Come, darling, you shall stay here no longer. Come, we'll be married at once and——

KATHARINE. No—never.

RALPH. What do you mean?

KATHARINE. I mean that I shall never marry you without my Mother's consent. To me she has always been a beautiful dream—an ideal,—and now— [*She chokes back a sob*] to hurt her career—no—I cannot do it—I cannot.

RALPH. But me,—what about *me?* Am I nothing to you?

KATHARINE [*In a strained voice*]. I will not take you away from her. No—no! I cannot.

RALPH. Katharine, you are talking like a romantic little fool. You are going to marry me tomorrow. As for Nina, she'll get over it. You don't know her as I do. Let her take Alfredo for her accompanist—then she'd sing his song—kill two birds with one stone. [KATHARINE *shakes her head.*] Do you think I shall give you up now?

KATHARINE. It's impossible—impossible! We must wait.

RALPH. Wait? What's the use of waiting? Do

you suppose once she gets her own way with us that she'll relent?

KATHARINE. Perhaps.

RALPH. Little do you know her. She would keep us apart forever. We will not wait, I tell you, we will be married tomorrow. [*He is speaking loudly.*]

BETTINA [*Entering from* NINA'S *room*]. Sssh! Signor, pianissimo! She has such a pain in the head, my poor darling—my little kitten—my sweet little pigeon. I have put her to bed. She must not be ill—the VOICE,—the VOICE! [*She exits to the kitchen.*]

RALPH. She'll be quiet for a time now—she always is after these spells. I'll go to my room and get things as ready as possible. Call 45 if you want me. Early tomorrow we'll get the license and be married——

KATHARINE. No, Ralph, not without her consent.

RALPH [*Comprehending for the first time her New England conscience*]. You—you mean that? [KATHARINE *nods unhappily.*] That means never, Katharine, —she'll never relent.

KATHARINE [*Trying to smile at him*]. Then we must wait. It isn't impossible so long as we can go about together, is it, dear?

RALPH. Go about with *her?* Have that tongue of hers lashing at us, and the claws of her envy tearing our hearts apart? Never. Listen to me, Katharine, you must choose between us, here and now. I'm through. Absolutely through. Will you choose her —or me?

KATHARINE. Ralph!

RALPH. Darling, say you'll come to me! Say you'll marry me tomorrow!

KATHARINE. I cannot—I cannot!

RALPH [*Angrily*]. Then this ends it! [*He starts for the door.*]

KATHARINE. Ralph! Ralph, you'll not leave me? I love you.

RALPH. *You!* You don't know what it is—love. She was right—your heart *is* in a strait-jacket. You're an iceberg! Farewell! [*He flings open the door just as* ALFREDO *starts to knock and* ALFREDO *almost falls into the room.* RALPH *glares at him wildly.*] Oh, you? YOU'LL find a welcome! [*He rushes off leaving* ALFREDO *standing nonplussed in the open door.*]

ALFREDO [*Uncertainly*]. I—I beg the Signorina's pardon! I—I—does the Signorina wish that I go?

KATHARINE [*Struggling for composure*]. I—I—[*She suddenly throws her arms on the piano and bends her head upon them sobbing.*]

ALFREDO [*Hesitating, then entering and closing the door softly behind him*]. My dear Signorina, if I can be of any service—? [*He waits and she sobs.*] If the Signorina would only tell me——?

KATHARINE [*Controlling herself*]. I beg—your—pardon, sir,—but—I am very—unhappy.

ALFREDO [*Taking and kissing her hand*]. Tch-cth! The angels must always be happy, Signorina, mia. May I not serve the Signorina?

KATHARINE. I don't know—I don't know! Oh! what shall I do—what shall I do! Tell me, sir, if two paths stretched before you, and Duty called on one, but all your heart and soul called on the other,—which would you go?

ALFREDO [*Smiling*]. Ah, dear young lady, mea culpa! I fear—yes, I know that my heart and soul would never call to me in vain. Pardon if I am rude but it is, is it not, that the young Ralph wishes that you marry him? [*She gives a gasp of surprise.*] and The Aristo—she will not—no? Am I not right?

KATHARINE. But who told you?

ALFREDO. It is before the eyes to read—like a book. I read love in the eyes of my friend when I was here just now, when I came with my song.

KATHARINE. Ah! your song, sir! Alas! [*She hands him the Ms.*] I fear we can do nothing. Ralph is gone—forever. I—I must go, too.

ALFREDO. Ah! the run-away marriage, eh? I applaud you!

KATHARINE. No—no! You misunderstand. I shall never marry without my Mother's—without Nina's consent. Ralph—he will not wait—he has said—farewell. I—I must go, too. Nina—hates me. She would not see me—any more. What shall I do—what shall I do!

ALFREDO. The Signorina has no one else?

KATHARINE [*Hesitant*]. Yes,—Aunt Mary. But—that seems like prison—now. Oh! [*She bows her head.*]

ALFREDO [*Considering*]. Let us see—I have just come from The Christobella. She was lamenting the loss of her companion,—a lady who served as a practice accompanist. If only, now, the Signorina played——

KATHARINE. Oh, but I do. Very well, too. I've studied all my life.

ALFREDO [*Doubtfully*]. So? I should not expect —the Signorina has not the air of temperament. [*He takes his Ms. to the piano.*] Come, play for me this song of mine.

KATHARINE [*Seating herself at piano*]. Yes, but very softly. We must not disturb *her*. [*She touches the piano.* ALFREDO *shows surprise.*]

ALFREDO. But you *do* play,—yes!

KATHARINE. I said so.

ALFREDO. Come, play it for me. [*She plays a short bit of it, and he sings, softly, bending over her shoulder so that their heads are close together.*]

KATHARINE. It is lovely!

ALFREDO [*Snatching her hands from the keys and kissing them*]. But thou art adorable, my little one—adorable!

KATHARINE [*Rising abruptly*]. Excuse me—I—do you think I might please The Christobella?

ALFREDO [*Taking up his hat*]. Si, Signorina. Play for her—and the thing is done. I'm sure of it. Shall we go?

KATHARINE [*Hesitating*]. I'm—so afraid—I——

ALFREDO [*In his best manner*]. If the Signorina fears The Christobella, there is still another way.

KATHARINE. Yes?

ALFREDO [*Bowing ceremoniously*]. I offer the Signorina the protection of my name. It would do me the greatest honor if the Signorina would marry me.

KATHARINE. Oh—oh, no—! Oh, sir, I am promised to Ralph.

ALFREDO. So? And in spite of that "farewell" there is hope, is that it? I see. Then there remains The Christobella. Shall we go?

KATHARINE [*Deciding*]. Yes. I will go. Wait till I get my things. [*She exits to her room.* ALFREDO *smiles, inspects the room, sees the broken cup and shrugs. Goes to the piano and hums his song, then goes to meet her as she enters, with hat and coat for the street.*]

ALFREDO. Do not fear, little one. The Christobella will love thee.

KATHARINE. I must leave word. [*She runs to the desk and scribbles a note, which she folds and puts on the music rack beside the Ms.*] There. She'll surely find it there. Now I am ready, Signor.

ALFREDO [*Bowing*]. At your service, Signorina! [*He opens the door for her, she makes a swift gesture of farewell to the room, and they exeunt together, closing the door.*]

. . . . . .

[*After a brief pause with an empty stage the door to* NINA'S *room swings open and her voice calls softly and musically.*]

NINA [*Off*]. Bettina! Oh—cee! Bettina, mia! [*Another pause and* NINA *enters from her room dressed in a truly magnificent robe. She shivers before the fire, looks round at the empty room and calls more loudly.*] Bettina! Ho—la! Bettina!

BETTINA [*Rushing in from the kitchen.*] Yes, yes, my darling, my kitten, my angel! Behold me! What wouldst thou, bambino, mia?

NINA. Good old Bettina! Thy Nina is so cold—so unhappy! Brrr! [*She shivers over the fire, which is low.*]

BETTINA [*Rushing to* NINA'S *room for a luxurious wrap, in which she enfolds her mistress and seats her carefully in the chair the while she talks*]. Cold! Madre Dios, thou shalt not be cold, my angel. See! thy Bettina will make a warm fire for her kitten. So! La-la-la-la! Art thou warm now, my pigeon? Hast thou slept? [*She gathers up the china fragments.*]

NINA [*Yawning prettily*]. N-o, not quite. Just dozed a bit. I thought I heard music—a lovely song—[*She stretches luxuriously.*] Oh! Bettina, mia, is the macaroni going to be good?

BETTINA. Si, little pigeon, si.

NINA. Bring me my apéritif, ma bonne. Will supper soon be ready? I'm famished.

BETTINA. At once, my darling, at once! I fly! [*Exits* BETTINA *to the kitchen.*]

. . . . . .

[NINA *sits for a moment, enjoying the fire like a kitten; then she throws back the wrap as if too warm and tries her voice, tentatively. She looks pleased, rises, goes to the piano, strikes a note or two—higher and higher, takes them with her voice, looks still more pleased. Now she sees the Ms. and then the note. She picks it up.*]

NINA. Tiens! a letter—for me? Who in the world—? [*She opens it, reads it swiftly and screams.* BETTINA, *who is just entering with the glass of apéritif, exclaims.*]

BETTINA [*Setting down the glass and running to* NINA.] My angel! My angel! What is it? What has hurt my darling? [NINA *continues to "take on" extending the note to* BETTINA *to read.*]

BETTINA [*Laboriously reading aloud*]. "Darling Nina: You wish never to see me again. Your wish is my law, for I love you. Farewell.

Your Katharine."

NINA [*Beating her breast*]. Mea culpa! Mea culpa! I have driven her to her death! Oh—oh—oh!

BETTINA. No—no, bella donna, she will be with Mr. Ralph. Think you not so, my pigeon?

NINA [*Angry*]. That is it! The sly fox! Run, Bettina—run, call Mr. Ralph. [*She paces the floor as* BETTINA *does so.*]

BETTINA [*Taking off phone*]. Hello! Signora, number—number— [*She looks at her mistress.*]

NINA. Number 45. Hurry!

BETTINA [*Into phone*]. Number 45. Si, Signora, si!—Oh! Signor—thank the angels in heaven it is you. Is the Signorina with you? [NINA *pauses to listen.*] She is not?—Oh, Signor—Signor, she is gone—departed, we know not where—and The Aristo is mad with fear. [NINA *remembers her rôle and begins to pace again.*] We do not know—there is a letter. Signor—[*She listens, then to* NINA:] Mr. Ralph is very excited—he have done *so.* [*She bangs the hook on the instrument.*]

NINA. Where—where—where, Bettina? [*She snatches up the note and re-reads it. Aloud:*] "I love you. Farewell!" Oh! Bettina, she is drowned—drowned! [*She paces and weeps aloud.*]

BETTINA. The VOICE, my pigeon,—do not spoil the VOICE! Why should the Signorina drown herself and she so beautiful?

NINA [*Stops weeping and her voice hardening*]. Beautiful? Did *you* think her beautiful, Bettina?

BETTINA. But of course, like a little bird. Not like The Aristo—a beauty to blind the eyes, but so soft and helpless,—as men like women.

NINA [*Scornfully*]. Ha! Men!

BETTINA. There comes Mr. Ralph. [*She runs and opens to him.*]

RALPH [*Rushing up to* NINA]. Where is she? What have you done to her? [*He is threatening.*]

NINA [*Handing him the letter*]. Read.

RALPH [*Reading and crushing it*]. YOU!—I hope now you are satisfied.

NINA. Me? You reproach *me?*

RALPH. You—her mother—a monstrous mother, with your colossal egotism, your selfishness, your vanity!

BETTINA [*Petting* NINA]. Signor—Signor! To bruise a mother's heart!

RALPH. God knows what her heart is, Bettina—'tis not a mother's. Motherhood gives—gives—gives; she takes—takes—takes. [*To* NINA.] You—you soak us up, till there is nothing left.

NINA. Oh—oh—oh! [*Beating her breast.*] My baby, my baby, my baby! Oh—oh—[*etc.*] Drowned—drowned!

RALPH. Stop it, Nina! [*She continues.*] Stop it, I say! [*Shouting.*] Stop it! [*She stops quite suddenly and looks at him inquiringly.*] This isn't Grand Opera and there's no spot-light on you. You know very well she's not drowned.

NINA. Then where is she? [*She begins to moan.*]

RALPH [*As if struck with an idea.*] Ha! I wonder? [*His face darkens.*] If I thought *that*——

NINA [*Suddenly hard and practical*]. What?

RALPH. Alfredo! He came in as I was leaving. It made me furious that she received him at such a time. He stayed—for I—well, I paced the hall outside and listened. I stayed till I heard him singing his song to her—I could stand it no longer and rushed away.

NINA. Singing? That was the singing *I* heard. Sapristi!

RALPH. Yes. Singing his love song to her—damn him!

NINA [*Her face lighting*]. Oh! *do* you think she may have eloped with him? [*Hopefully.*]

RALPH. You'd be pleased?

NINA. Well, it's better than drowning, and it would leave everything as it was before, Beppo.

RALPH. Things will *never* be "as they were before," I tell you. I'm through. If I thought he'd eloped with her I'd—I'd——

[*The bell rings and before* BETTINA *can open* RALPH *has rushed to the door and flung it wide.* ALFREDO, *who is on the threshold is dragged into the room by* RALPH.] You—you—YOU! [*He shakes him as a terrier shakes a rat.*]

ALFREDO. En guard! Look out! [*He struggles with* RALPH.]

RALPH [*Furious*]. Where is she? Tell me—tell me! [*They struggle, the women scream.*]

ALFREDO [*Throwing* RALPH *off.*] Here! Keep your hands off me, will you! Are you mad?

NINA [*Running to him*]. Signor! Signor! I implore you, tell me where my daughter is?

ALFREDO. I cannot tell you without her permission.

RALPH [*Making for him*]. You scoundrel! You——

ALFREDO [*Holding him off*]. Keep cool, my friend, keep cool!

BETTINA. Signor! is—is she safe?

ALFREDO. Perfectly safe, Bettina.

NINA [*In her Grand Opera manner*]. Oh, my baby —my baby! I must see her—I must—I must!

ALFREDO. That is perfectly possible, Signora, if you *wish* to see her. Do you?

NINA. Oh! my baby——

RALPH. Stop it, Nina! [*To* ALFREDO.] If you do not tell us instantly——

ALFREDO [*Quietly*]. That I am not permitted to do, but if the Signora [*He turns to* NINA] really wishes to see her daughter, it is easily arranged. May I use your phone?

NINA. Of course—of course!

ALFREDO [*Stepping to telephone*]. Hello! Central, Studio 75, please. Yes, please.

NINA [*Under her breath*]. The Christobella!

ALFREDO [*Smiling to himself*]. Hello! Number 75? May I speak to Miss Aristo, please?

NINA. You mean to say——

ALFREDO [*Offering her the phone*]. Would you like to ask her to come home?

NINA [*Snatching at it*]. Yes, yes, I——

RALPH [*Taking the phone from her*]. *I* shall speak to her.

ALFREDO [*Shrugging*]. As you please, but that will not turn the trick, my friend. The Signora must say that she wishes to *see* her daughter,—since she has left home because——

NINA [*Snatching the phone from* RALPH]. Give it to me. [*Into phone.*] Hello!—Hello! is that you, my little one? This is Mother—yes, MOTHER! I've

been frantic about you. Won't you please come down to me,—yes—as fast as the elevator will bring you. Yes, please. Hurry! [*She turns, after hanging up the phone.*] There, Beppo, she's coming.

RALPH [*To* ALFREDO]. Will you kindly explain *your* connection with this affair and why you came here just now?

ALFREDO. Gladly. I came to order Bettina to pack the Signorina's trunk.

ALL. TRUNK!

ALFREDO [*Enjoying himself*]. Precisely—trunk.

RALPH [*Enraged*]. You mean that you are taking her——?

ALFREDO [*Warding him off*]. Hold on, my friend, you are too quick on the trigger. Before the Signorina comes, there is something I would say to you, and to The Aristo. [*He is at center, they on either side of him.*]

NINA and RALPH. What?

ALFREDO [*Bowing to* NINA]. With many apologies to the Signora, I find the Signorina badly treated. You [*To* NINA] told her you wished never to see her face again. [NINA *turns away.*] Ah! Signora—that so lovely face! [*To* RALPH.] And you, my friend,—you, who pretend to love her, are cruel to her when you cannot have your own way. I think, Signor, Signora, that you do not love her. You love only yourselves.

NINA and RALPH [*To each other angrily*]. YOU! [KATHARINE *enters the door softly, unseen.*]

ALFREDO. See! You hate each other. You love only your own desires. That is not love. You do not deserve her. She is leaving you.

BOTH. Leaving!

KATHARINE. Oh, no, Signor!

[*All turn with cries of surprise.* NINA *holds out her arms and* KATHARINE *runs into them.*] Mother! Oh, Mother!

NINA. My child! [*They embrace.* BETTINA *sniffs, shows alarm and shouts.*]

BETTINA. My macaroni! It burns! My macaroni! [*She makes a rushing exit to the kitchen.*]

RALPH. Katharine—you are not leaving? What does this mean? Where are you going?

KATHARINE. Has the Signor not told you? Such good fortune! I go to be companion and practice accompanist to The Christobella.

ALL. The Christobella!

NINA [*Screaming*]. The Christobella! My hated rival! You go to her? Never! Never, I tell you. You shall *not* leave. You shall stay right here and marry Ralph—tomorrow. I insist—*tomorrow.*

KATHARINE [*Gasping*]. Tomorrow! [*She turns to* RALPH, *who opens his arms to her.*] Oh! Ralph! [*She runs into them.*]

NINA. Bless you, my children! And now, run out to the dining-room to bill and coo. I can't stand you in here. [*They start.*] Help Bettina set the table.

KATHARINE [*Happily*]. Yes—Nina.

NINA. Call me Mother. Put on an extra place for

Alfredo. [*Exeunt* Ralph *and* K.] He is staying to supper.

Alfredo [*Kissing* Nina's *hand*]. May I, dearest Lady? My compliments and also my thanks. I should so like to show to the Signora my little song.

Nina. Yes, yes, but first, mon ami, first you must promise to be my accompanist.

Alfredo [*Drawing back.*] But, Signora—I do not wish— It is that I wish to compose—always to write —write!

Nina [*Sweetly*]. You shall write, mon enfant, but you shall also play my accompaniments. I—I myself, The Great Aristo, will teach you.

Alfredo [*Reluctant*]. But—I would write, Signora, I have only the time——

Nina [*Taking him by the arm, just as she did* Ralph *in the previous scene, and laying her head against his shoulder*]. You shall go with me, and you shall have everything. We will travel the world over. We will go back to Rome—your beloved Rome, chéri, and I will put you on my programs in letters—yes, as large as my own—mine, The Great Aristo. Think of the crowds, the applause, the fame! [*She looks up at him to calculate her effect.*]

Alfredo. But my song——?

Nina [*Sweetly smiling*]. Your song I adore, and I shall make the world adore it.

Alfredo [*Rapturously kissing her hand*]. Ah! Signora—Signora! I am your willing slave.

Nina [*Practical*]. Then that's settled! Good!

Now show me your song. [*They move to the piano.*]

ALFREDO. It is a love song, Signora. It sings of how love sacrifices *all* for the beloved.

NINA [*Dryly*]. Yes! It always has—for me.

[ALFREDO *begins to play the same song* KATHARINE *played earlier.* NINA *stands behind him, her hands on his shoulders, looking at the Ms. as the curtain falls, slowly.*]

CURTAIN.

THEIR ANNIVERSARY [1]

A Comedy

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"Their Anniversary" first published in *The Drama,* February 1922.

CHARACTERS

Gerald Drummond, lawyer, 30 years old, dressed in golf togs.

Flora, his wife, 25 years old, dressed in a simple evening gown.

Nora, their cook and house-maid, dressed in black with a white apron. Fat, old and Irish.

Tom Jones, business man, 40 years old, dressed in dinner clothes.

Jane Jones, his wife, 29 years old, dressed in a very elaborate evening gown, with a handsome cloak.

A. D. T., messenger boy, in uniform.

THEIR ANNIVERSARY

The garden side of the Drummond house in a nice suburb of a big city, shows the living-porch and a little of the garden at each end. Paths lead from either side in a curve to the front of the porch, where are steps or stepping-stones. A straight path also leads directly into the left end of the porch. This straight path is the one Gerald uses. The drive is just off at the left. The living-porch is very attractively furnished. In the façade of the house, a door enters at the extreme right, and a window, which is open, gives into an attractive sitting-room. A table with a desk-telephone is just inside this window, so that the receiver may be taken through the window and used on the porch. Besides the usual porch furniture, a small dinner table on the porch is laid for four people. It is nicely set forth with the best linen, silver and china. A bouquet adorns the center of the table. Chairs are placed at right and left places, but not at up and down places. FLORA *is putting the finishing touches to the flowers, while* NORA *is placing the second chair. A clock within strikes seven.*

FLORA. There! It's seven o'clock, Nora, and Mr. Drummond's not home yet.

NORA. 'Tis the great play-boy he is, mum,

FLORA. He's playing golf today with his favorite foursome, so he's sure to be late.

NORA. But the dinner, mum?

FLORA. I was trying to surprise him with this anniversary dinner, but I'm almost afraid it was a mistake. Did you lay out his things, Nora?

NORA [*Holding up an electric bell and cord*]. Yis, mum. How do this bell be fixed, mum?

FLORA. Push it in the floor-socket there, Nora. [NORA *does so, and arranges the push-button at the right-hand place. Meanwhile,* FLORA *hums gaily a little tune.*] These flowers are really lovely, Nora. Wasn't it good of Mr. Jones to send them! I don't see how he gets things to grow so.

NORA. 'Tis the elbow-grease he does be puttin' into that garden o' his'n does it, mum. Sure'n he's there hoein' ivery avenin' whiles the missus does be away. Mis' Jones does sure be travelin' a lot, mum.

FLORA. Yes, she's a great club-woman, Nora, and in demand as a speaker. It's a good thing she has such a devoted husband.

NORA. It is that, mum. Shall I be bringin' the other chairs now, mum?

FLORA. Finish laying the silver first, Nora. Mr. and Mrs. Jones will be here before we know it. [*She gives a finishing touch here and there.*]

NORA. Indade, Mis' Drummond, mum, but I doubt Mis' Jones is back yit. Her Bridget went by the hour and she'd not come thin.

FLORA. So? Mr. Jones expected her this morning.

By the way, Nora, be sure that you serve the soup and the coffee very hot and the salad and ices very cold tonight. Mr. Drummond hates cold soup.

NORA. Sure, don't I know it, mum!

FLORA. And especially, Nora, be sure you light the three candles on the anniversary cake before you bring it in. You see, Mr. Drummond and I have been married three years tonight, and I want to surprise him.

NORA. Yis, mum, 'tis Mr. Drummond himself must be surprised he's been married three years, mum.

FLORA. I think he'll love his anniversary, don't you, Nora?

NORA. Well, mum, I do be thinkin' 'tis little the min cares fur anny annyvars'ry mostly. God hilp thim!

FLORA. Oh! but Mr. Drummond does, Nora. I'm sure he has an anniversary surprise for me, for he never mentioned a word this morning of what day it is.

NORA. Sure mebby he forgot it himself, mum.

FLORA. Oh, no, Nora, he *couldn't!* Why, it's only three years ago today we were married. Mr. and Mrs. Jones have their anniversary today, too, though, of course, they've been married longer. That's why I invited them and made it a double anniversary dinner.[1] Is the roast coming on well, Nora?

NORA. Beautiful, mum. [*A motor horn is heard.*

[1] Note: In case a porch set is not available, and it becomes necessary to use an interior, a living-room may be substituted; in which case insert the following line in Flora's speech to Nora, at the place where reference appears in her lines "and set the table here in the living-room to make things more cozy."

FLORA *runs to the left end of porch and peers down the path.*]

FLORA. There's the car now. [*More motor noises.*] There he is! Oh, Gerald, Gerald!

GERALD. Hello! Hello! [*He enters, running.*] Hello, Flo-flo! [*He kisses her perfunctorily.*] I can't stop a minute, dear. [*To* NORA.] Bring me my overcoat, Nora. [NORA *goes out and returns with the coat, which she gives to* GERALD, *then goes out again.*] Just thought I'd get my coat for the ride back tonight. We stuck Joe Briggs on the game today, and he asked us to dine with him in his little old shack of a bachelor place. He'll give us that lobster Newburg his Jap makes so well; and you know his cellar—oh, boy! Wouldn't miss it for the world! [*Motor horn blows impatiently.* GERALD *calls.*] All right, boys! [*To* FLORA.] The boys are in a hurry. Going just as we are. Kiss me by-by, Flo-flo. [*He kisses her carelessly.*]

FLORA. But, Gerald——

GERALD [*Noticing for the first time the table*]. Hello! Giving a little dinner yourself, eh? Who are *you* entertaining?

FLORA. Oh, just the Joneses. But, Gerald——

GERALD [*Relieved*]. Oh, well, the Joneses! Old Tom'll excuse me—he knows what a Briggs blowout means; and Jane will be so busy telling about her last lecture-tour that she'll never miss me. [*The horn sounds again.*] Coming! I must run, dear.

FLORA [*Preventing him*]. But Gerald—it's—it's a surprise—and—and an anniversary. [*She looks at him hopefully.*]

GERALD [*Unsuspecting*]. Anniversary? Whose? Old Tom's? Oh, he's had so many I'll bet they bore him to death. [*Horn.*] Tom won't care a bit, and I've promised to go. Haven't seen much of Joe lately, you know. He's been mooning around since that girl turned him down. So long! [*He kisses her lightly and starts down the path.*]

FLORA [*Wailing.*] But Gerald—it's—it's the anniversary——

GERALD. Hang the anniversary. [*He laughs and calls back*]. Tell old Tom many happy returns of the day. By-by! [*He goes out.*]

FLORA [*Calling*]. But Gerald— [*There is the noise of the motor departing. She covers her face with her hands.*] Oh!

NORA [*Entering*]. 'Tis bilin' hot the soup is, mum, an' the roast done, an' I seen Mr. Jones be the garden path the minute, mum. [*She stands back awaiting orders.*]

FLORA [*Struggling to regain her composure*]. Oh! Oh, dear! [*She looks desperately at the table and goes forward to meet her guests.*]

TOM [*Entering by the right-hand pathway*]. Good evening, Flora, I'm afraid I'm late. The truth is, Jane isn't home yet. You know, she went on that speaking tour for the league this time. I expected her

home this morning, but she hasn't come yet and I've not had a word. [*He mops his brow.*] I waited till the last min .te. I'm—I'm sort of worried.

FLORA. Oh, don't worry, Tom! I'm sure she's all right.

NORA. Ahem! Is it servin' the dinner I'll be, mum?

FLORA. No, no, Nora, not yet. Hold it back a little. Mrs. Jones may be here any minute. [NORA *leaves reluctantly.*] Dear me! [*She gives an embarrassed little laugh.*] It's rather funny, isn't it! Gerald isn't here either.

TOM. So? Where's Gerald?

FLORA. Why—he—he—you see—I wanted to surprise Gerald, so I didn't remind him that this is the anniversary of our wedding. To tell the truth, I thought, when he didn't mention it this morning, that he was trying to surprise me in some way. And I didn't tell him I'd invited you and Jane to dine with us tonight, either; so he's gone off with his foursome to dine with Joe Briggs. [*She is near tears.*]

TOM [*Whistling surprise*]. Hum! Well, I guess I must be going back home. It's too bad Jane didn't get here in time for dinner. Sorry! Good-by, Flora.

FLORA [*Catching his sleeve*]. No you don't, Tom Jones. Don't you dare desert me. If I have to eat this—this old anniversary dinner alone I'll—I'll *die.* [*She stifles a sob.*]

TOM [*Torn between hunger, pity and propriety*]. But you—I—Jane——?

FLORA. You can't go home. You haven't any din-

ner at your house, and your maid's gone out—I saw her. Please stay, Tom—I'm so lonesome.

TOM [*Doubtfully*]. Well, of course, if you put it that way— [*Hesitates*] but Jane may arrive any minute. You see, she was away when your invitation came, and she doesn't know about the dinner. I accepted, thinking she would be home this morning. [*Apprehensively.*] If she gets home and I'm not there, I don't know what she'll do.

FLORA [*Playing her last card*]. Please stay, Tom; I've got a very good dinner.

TOM. All right, I will.

FLORA [*Enormously relieved*]. Good! We'll begin at once. I'll ring. Come, sit down at the table and let's be cozy. [*He seats her ceremoniously and then goes to his own seat. As this play of seating is important in effect as the play goes on, it is necessary to establish, in the beginning, the formality and manner of it, and to repeat it exactly each time.*] Tell me, what have you been doing with yourself while Jane has been away? [*Rings.*]

TOM. Oh, just the usual: work at the office all day, work in the garden evenings and Saturdays. Have you seen my roses? They're fine.

FLORA. You forget you sent some over by Bridget this morning. See, I have them here on the table. I thank you, Tom.

TOM. Pleasure, I'm sure.

FLORA. Does Jane like the garden?

TOM. Well, you see, Jane's mind is taken up with

her club-work. She's in such demand for speaking that she hasn't much time for the garden. She's a wonderful speaker—is Jane.

FLORA [*Absently*]. Yes, yes, I'm sure she is.

TOM [*Proudly*]. She's dated up for weeks ahead.

FLORA. For lecture tours?

TOM. Yes, all over the country.

FLORA [*Thoughtfully*]. Tom, how long have you and Jane been married?

TOM. Oh! about fifteen years.

FLORA [*Aghast*]. *About!* Don't you *know?* We've been married only three years, but I'm sure I could never forget a single day. My goodness! Why doesn't Nora come? I'm afraid this bell doesn't work. [*She presses the bell hard. They both listen. She shakes her head.*]

TOM [*Rising and coming over to her side*]. These electric things are always getting out of order. [*He presses hard on the button without result.*]

FLORA [*Rising,* TOM *pulling her chair back and waiting beside it while she goes to the door*]. I shall have to call her. [*She calls.*] Nora! Nora!

NORA [*Within*]. Yis, mum.

FLORA [*Coming back to her place and being seated again with same form as before*]. Sorry!

TOM [*Going to his own place and seating himself*]. Don't mention it.

NORA [*Appearing at the door*]. Mum?

FLORA. Serve the soup now, Nora.

NORA [*In consternation*]. Please, mum, the soup's cold.

FLORA. Cold?

NORA. Yis, mum, you said to be holdin' the dinner back, mum.

FLORA. So I did, Nora, so I did. Well, make it hot again as quickly as possible and serve it. Meanwhile, clear away these places. The others won't be here now.

NORA [*Flustered*]. Yis, mum. *She goes to the table and gathers up, hit-or-miss, some things from each service and goes out with them.*]

FLORA [*Forcing herself to be gay*]. I hope you don't mind waiting a moment, Tom? I'm sure you like your soup hot.

TOM [*Fervently*]. I *do*. I've tried for years to convince Jane it should be served hot.

FLORA. Oh! does she like it lukewarm?

TOM. She seems not to care *how* it is. You see, Jane's mind is always on her next speech, and housekeeping bores her.

FLORA. Oh! it bores her! [*She looks keenly at* TOM.] Tom, did you remember that this was your wedding anniversary all by yourself?

TOM. Sure. [*He puts his hand in his pocket and draws out a jeweler's box.*] Want to see the present I got her?

FLORA. Oh, yes! [*He opens the case as pleased as Punch and hands it to* FLORA.] Oh! isn't it lovely!

It just suits Jane. She's been wanting a diamond barpin for such a long time. How she'll love it! [*Wistfully.*] Tom, you're a wonderful husband. [*She studies him a moment thoughtfully as he puts the jewel away.*] See here, Tom Jones, tell me the truth; do you think Jane has forgotten that this is the anniversary of her wedding?

TOM [*Reluctantly*]. Well, Flora, I shouldn't wonder. [*He slips the box back in his pocket.*] You see, Jane's mind is always——

FLORA. Yes, I know all about Jane's mind. Tom, you and I are going to have a heart-to-heart talk.

TOM [*Embarrassed*]. Heart to heart?

FLORA. Now don't be silly, Tom Jones! I know how you adore Jane and you know how I adore Gerald, and we both know that they—well—we *think* they're fond of us, don't we?

TOM. That's right.

FLORA. But——

TOM. But?

FLORA. But that doesn't prevent both Gerald and Jane from forgetting all about us and our likes and dislikes, and our wedding anniversaries and—and things; and from going off on their own whenever it happens to please them to do so—now does it?

TOM [*Ruefully*]. That's right.

FLORA. What's the matter with us?

TOM. Matter? With us? Nothing, that is——

FLORA. Oh! yes there is. There is some reason why those two go on their own sweet way rejoicing,

while you and I hang around waiting for "the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table." We're Lazarus and they're the feast.

TOM. That's right.

FLORA [*Insistent*]. What's the reason? Do we care more for them than they care for us?

TOM [*Considering this*]. Well—I don't know—maybe.

FLORA. They're pretty sure of us, aren't they?

TOM. That's right, Flora, mighty sure!

FLORA [*Scornfully*]. We're just two nice soft cushions waiting for them to come home to when they're tired of everything else.

TOM. Soft cushions? Um! Do you think so?

FLORA [*Decidedly*]. *I do.* And what's more, I'm going to stop. I'm not going on with it. [*She pounds the table.*] I refuse to lick up any more crumbs.

TOM [*With visions of the divorce court in mind*]. Flora! Flora! What are you going to do?

FLORA. I am going to keep Gerald guessing.

TOM [*Puzzled*]. Guessing?

FLORA. Yes, guessing. This world is made up of people who are sure and of people who guess. Gerald's going to guess a while.

TOM. Um! So? [NORA *enters and goes to take some of the rest of the things from the two set-ups.*]

FLORA. Isn't the soup hot, Nora?

NORA. Yis, mum.

FLORA. Very well, Nora, serve it.

NORA. Yis, mum. [NORA *goes out with a few scattering things.*]

FLORA. Tom Jones, I've thought a lot about this question all summer. I've been alone while Gerald's been off playing golf, and I've watched you alone, working in your garden while Jane has been off galavanting over the country. You've looked as lonesome as I've felt. [TOM *starts to protest but she raises a detaining hand.*] Oh! I know how proud you are of Jane, and of her ability to make a corking good speech. So am I proud of Gerald and his low golf score, and his ability to make friends. Just the same, Tom, it looks to me as if you and I are likely to spend the rest of our lives licking up crumbs unless we do something about it.

TOM. That's right.

[A. D. T. MESSENGER *approaches, whistling, by left pathway with telegram.*]

FLORA. Oh! Oh! Oh! Tom, look! It's a telegram. Maybe something's happened. Maybe someone's dead. [*She rises.*] Oh, Tom!

TOM [*Rising and going to meet the boy*]. Not a chance, Flora, take it easy.

BOY. This where Joneses live?

TOM. I'm Jones. [*The boy hands him the telegram.* TOM *signs; tips the boy, who goes out whistling; tears open the envelope and reads the message.*]

FLORA [*She meanwhile has approached with fear and trembling*]. Oh, Tom—is—is she—is she——?

TOM [*Cheerfully*]. Not a bit of it. It's Jane.

Listen: "Had an extra speech to make. Delayed. Home on Flyer seven-ten." [*Looks at wrist-watch.*] Gad! Her train's in and I didn't meet her! She'll be home any minute now.

NORA [*Entering with cup of steaming soup*]. Th' soup's grand an' hot, mum. [*They both turn and regard her in a daze.*]

FLORA [*Awakening to her responsibilities*]. Oh!—Oh, Nora, it's too bad, but I'll have to ask you to hold dinner back a little. You see, we've just had a wire from Mrs. Jones—she'll be here any minute now.

NORA [*Dazed*]. An' ye'll not be havin' th' soup now?

FLORA [*Apologetically*]. Not for a little while, Nora. I'll tell you when she comes. [NORA *goes out dejectedly.*] Isn't it nice Jane's coming? [*She says this with forced cheerfulness.*]

TOM. It's too bad, Flora—er—perhaps you'd better not wait. [*He says this as a mere formality.*]

FLORA [*Also formal*]. Oh, yes! yes, indeed! It's quite all right, I assure you. We must wait for Jane, of course. [*The telephone bell rings.* FLORA *goes to the window and draws it through to the porch side.*] Hello! Hello! Yes, this is Mrs. Drummond—Oh, Jane, is that you? [TOM *starts.*]—So glad you're home!—Why—yes,—your husband's here—for dinner. —Yes.—To whom?—Oh, Gerald!—Why—why—well, you see, Gerald isn't here.—No—No— No, he went out to dinner—that is—well, I was trying to surprise him.—Who?—No, Gerald. I was trying to surprise

Gerald.—Is he?—Is he what? Oh, surprised? Why —I—yes, certainly—just hold the wire. [*She covers the receiver with her hand and speaks to* Tom.] She wants to speak to you. She doesn't sound very—very jolly. [*She hands the instrument to* Tom.]

Tom. Hello—Yes, hello, dearest!—Yes, I just this minute got it. Glad you're back.—Yes, yes, I'm sorry I wasn't there to meet you. You see, Flora had invited us over to dinner tonight, and I had accepted—what?—Yes, I know, dearest, only I thought you'd *like* to come, especially on account of the day.—Why, Jane, you surely haven't forgotten what day it is!—Yes, yes, I know it's Saturday, but I mean, sentimentally.—You know—it's the anniversary—no, not birthday—wedding.—Yes, our wedding anniversary.—Of course, dear, your mind has been full of other things —that's quite all right.—Well, if you'd been home—no, no—I'm *not* finding fault, only it's the Drummond's anniversary, too, and Flora is giving a dinner to celebrate.—What?—Oh, yes she *did* expect Gerald, but—well—well—I'll have to explain that later.—Oh, no, dearest,—there, there, you don't understand.—I'll come right home, darling.—What?—Say, Jane—Jane —listen!—[*He stares for a moment blindly at nothing, wiggling the receiver bar up and down.*] She's hung up. [*He hangs up.*] I've got to go right home. [*He starts.*]

Flora. Tom Jones, if you *do*, you'll be licking up crumbs for the rest of your life.

TOM. What do you mean?

FLORA. I mean that if you encourage Jane to think she can go off any old time and stay just as long as she wants to, and come back whenever it pleases her; and that meanwhile you'll just hoe in the garden, and be there with open arms to receive her—well, you can just make up your mind that for the rest of your life you'll be doing that crumb business.

TOM [*Distressed*]. But what shall I do?

FLORA. Do? Stand your ground. Be a man. Keep *her* guessing a bit. Do you suppose if *I* went gadding all over creation, that I'd find Gerald here waiting for me when I got home? [TOM *nods emphatically.*] Oh!—you do? Really? [TOM *nods.*] Oh!—well, maybe you're right. I've let him be too sure of me. Come, Tom, they keep us guessing all the time—let's make them try it a bit.

TOM. But what shall I do?

FLORA [*She thinks a minute and goes to the telephone*]. Let me phone her.

TOM. It's no use; she won't come.

FLORA. I think she will. [*She takes off receiver.*] Hello! Hello! Central, give me 905. Yes, please.—Now, Tom, promise you'll back me up. [TOM *nods reluctant consent.*] Hello! Hello! is that you, Jane? So glad, dear, that you're back in time for our double anniversary dinner. You see, we both have the same date. I just *made* old Tom accept when I found you were to be back today. He had *just* come over to say

you hadn't come, and bring regrets.—Yes, you're just in time to save the day—and the dinner. Oh! no, you can't dine at home. Your ice-box is empty and your cook's gone out—and I've got such a good dinner. Yes. Umhummmm! Oh! I've got on just my little blue gown. Don't wait to change, dear, come just as you are.—Well, hurry then, we can't wait to hear all about your trip. I'm sure you made a hit. All right, dear, hurry. I'll hold dinner back. [*She hangs up and smiles at* Tom.] I told you she'd come.

Tom [*Starting to go*]. I'll go bring her.

Flora [*Catching his coat-tails*]. No you don't! You'll do nothing of the sort. Do you want to spoil it all? This is your big chance, Tom Jones, now play up to it.

Tom. But what shall I do?

Flora [*Smiling at him.*] Do? Why, you're going to make up to me. You're going to make Jane a bit—just a little bit jealous of you—and me.

Tom. But I don't——

Flora. Oh! don't worry, Tom, it's just a little game. If Jane thinks that, while she is away, you are here dining with me—well, I may be mistaken, but I think—I'll lay a wager—she'll stay at home more. You *do* want her to stay at home more, don't you, Tom?

Tom [*Wiping his brow*]. Good Lord, yes!

Flora. Well, then, play up to me. When I step on your foot, remember you are to seem awfully interested in me. Do you think you can do it?

TOM [*Dolefully*]. I'll try.

FLORA [*Scornfully*]. Thank you so much! Flatterer!

TOM. Sorry, Flora!

FLORA. Now promise me that you—you'll play the game for me, too, so Gerald won't feel quite so sure I'm licking crumbs.

TOM [*Half-heartedly*]. All right.

FLORA [*Discouraged*]. Oh, dear! It won't be any good at all. You can't do it. It's perfectly sickening! You're so much in love with Jane, and I'm so much in love with Gerald, that we never shall be able to hide it; never—never—never! [*She sinks dejectedly into a porch chair.*]

TOM [*Bucking up*]. Oh, come, I say! It's not so bad as that. Of course, it's true that I'm daffy about Jane.

FLORA [*Grimly*]. You certainly are.

TOM. And you are simply silly over Gerald.

FLORA. Oh! Do you think so?

TOM. Everybody thinks so.

FLORA [*Brooding*]. Then that's it.

TOM [*Conciliatingly*]. But after all, you're a mighty nice little woman.

FLORA [*Very low in her mind*]. Thank you.

TOM. And not hard to look at.

FLORA [*Brightening*]. Oh, *do* you think so? That helps a lot, doesn't it? [*She beams at him.*] I've always admired you a lot, too, Tom. Do you think maybe we *could* put it over?

TOM [*Heartily*]. I'll say we can. [*Doubtfully.*] But how'll we do it?

FLORA. We must seem interested in each other and in *no one else.* I'll hang upon your every word, and you must look at me all the time and not at Jane. [*Overwhelmed at the impossibility of this.*] Oh! it's no use, you'll never do it.

TOM. Honestly, Flora, I'll try.

FLORA. Thank you, Tom. And we must seem to have little, private understandings, you know, just between ourselves, which we are trying to cover up.

TOM [*Grinning*]. Gerald will want to punch my head.

FLORA. Oh, wouldn't that be splendid!

TOM [*Doubtfully*]. Fine.

FLORA [*Holding out her hand*]. Is it a bargain?

TOM [*Taking it solemnly*]. That's right. [*They shake hands.*]

FLORA. There's that. Now we are all ready for the anniversary dinner. [*They turn back toward the table.*] Oh, my goodness! We haven't got Jane's place set. [*She runs to the door and calls.*] Nora, oh, Nora!

NORA [*Appearing at the door*]. Yis, mum?

FLORA [*Running back to the head of the table and beginning to rearrange the set-ups*]. Nora, Mrs. Jones *is* coming after all. Hurry and set a place for her here.

NORA [*Distracted*]. Yis, mum! [*She bustles about and does nothing.*]

FLORA [*Practical*]. Here! We'll take the knife and fork from Mr. Drummond's place. Bring two forks, a small coffee and a soup spoon.

NORA. Yis, mum. [*She goes out muttering: "wan fork."*]

FLORA. We must get it set before Jane comes. She'll never forgive me if it looks as if I did not expect her. Hurry! Hurry!

TOM [*Distractedly*]. How? Where? What shall I do?

FLORA. Go bring her a chair from the dining-room.

TOM. Right-o! [*He makes a dash for the door and collides with* NORA *coming out with the silver. The silver flies and* NORA *and* TOM *crack heads as they reach for it.*]

TOM. Confound it! I beg your pardon! [*He dashes in.*]

NORA [*Bringing the silver to her mistress*]. Here it be, mum.

FLORA. Nora! You know it has to be washed after being on the floor. Or—no—quicker to get others. Hurry, please!

NORA. Yis, mum. [*She goes out rubbing her head.*]

TOM *and* NORA *meet again at the door but avoid each other elaborately. He enters with a chair as she goes out.*]

TOM. Where shall I put it?

FLORA [*Indicating place*]. Here. Thank you so much, Tom.

NORA [*She runs in with the wrong silver*]. Here they be, mum.

FLORA. Oh, Nora, these are all wrong. Take these back and bring *two forks, a small coffee and a soup spoon.* Take a tray and bring also the service plate, butter plate and glass. Hurry!

NORA. Yis, mum. [NORA *rushes out, trying to remember her list.*]

FLORA [*Noticing that* TOM *is poised for flight on the porch-edge*]. Now, Tom, be brave.

TOM. Hang it all, Flora, she'll need me to hook her up.

FLORA [*Decisively*]. You stay right here. [NORA *enters with tray with needed articles, which she holds as her mistress takes them from the tray and sets the place.*] There isn't a service plate here. [*One eye on* TOM.] Nora, you go back to your dinner; Mr. Jones will help me. [NORA *goes out.*] Tom, please bring me a service plate. [TOM *hesitates; she points commandingly at the door; he goes in reluctantly; she throws up her hands in despair. Now she hears* JANE *approaching by the path. She throws up her head, braces herself, and advances to meet her.* JANE *sails in in full regalia.*] Welcome home, dear Jane! I'm so glad you got here in time for the dinner. It looked for a time as if Tom and I would have to celebrate our anniversaries alone—er—well—not *alone* exactly—eh—but—you know what I mean. How lovely you look!

JANE [*Dryly*]. Thank you! Where's Tom?

FLORA [*Sweetly*]. Oh! he's just helping me set the

table. He's so good at house-work, isn't he? You must be a wonderful teacher. You *must* show me how you do it.

TOM [*Entering with a plate in his hands*]. Is this it, Flora? [*He sees* JANE, *and drops the plate to ruin, starting toward her.*] Jane! [*He stops, views the havoc at his feet; starts to help* NORA, *who has run from the house at the crash; changes and starts toward* JANE; *changes again and helps* NORA.] Well, Jane, you're—you're back! [NORA *goes out with the pieces.*]

JANE. So it would seem; but why make it a disaster?

TOM. Sorry, Flora.

FLORA [*Very sweetly*]. It doesn't matter in the least, Tom, you funny big boy! I shouldn't have let you help me—tonight. [JANE *and* TOM *both start.*] Come now, like a good husband, and greet Jane; she's waiting for you. [JANE *submits coolly to his embrace.*] Doesn't she look lovely, Tom, though a little tired, I'll say. The strain of travel *does* show, in the long run, doesn't it? [NORA *enters with another plate and places it for* JANE.] Now sit right down here, dear Jane. [FLORA *on* JANE'S *right and* TOM *on her left, seat her.* FLORA *goes to her place, followed by* TOM, *who seats her, and then himself.* NORA *has fluttered helplessly in the background, trying to see if all is on.*] Now, Nora, you may serve the soup.

NORA. Please, mum, the soup's been held back that long it's as cold as the grave, it is, mum.

FLORA. Well, heat it as soon as you can, and serve it, Nora.

NORA. Yis, mum. [*She goes out.*]

FLORA. You won't mind a little wait, will you, Jane dear? I know Tom likes his soup hot, so we must have it hot, you know. These husbands—eh, my dear? They *must* be catered to. [JANE *glares at* TOM, *who fidgets with his silver.*]

TOM [*Trying to be diplomatic*]. What kind of trip did you have, old girl?

JANE [*Sharply*]. Don't call me "old girl"!

FLORA [*Sweetly*]. Now, that's just what I say. I'm sure when I get to be—well—that is—I shall *never* allow Gerald to call me "old girl" no matter *how* old I get to be. [*She beams,* TOM *fidgets and* JANE *glares.*] Tell us about your speech, Jane. I'm sure you made a hit.

TOM. That's right.

JANE [*Not to be mollified*]. I thought you were expecting me.

FLORA [*Easily*]. Oh, we were, my dear, we were. First we had you on and then we had you off, and then we had Gerald on and then we had him off; it's only good old Tom and I who can be trusted to stay put, isn't it, Tom? [*She kicks him under the table.*]

TOM. Tha—tha—that's right.

JANE. Why isn't Gerald here for his wedding anniversary?

FLORA. Well, you see, I was trying to surprise him,

and so he didn't know it. Of course, we women always remember anniversaries, don't we Jane? But men—[*She shrugs.*] Gerald ran off with his foursome to dine with Joe Briggs in his bachelor quarters. I think it's time Joe Briggs got married, myself. So —I was alone and old Tom was alone, and we were just trying to make it up to each other, weren't we, Tom? [*She kicks him again.*]

TOM [*Miserably*]. That's right.

JANE. Joe Briggs? Why, he caught the Flyer just as I got off it. As for his getting married, he's evidently going to do that right now, for there was a big crowd of men there, seeing him off; handing up to him all sorts of packages and joshing him about the suddenness of the wedding—something about a last-minute telegram from the girl. He was apologizing to the crowd for a dinner he hadn't given them. Come to think of it, I *did* see some one who looked like Gerald there—yes, I'm sure.

FLORA [*Delighted*]. Oh! then maybe he'll come home to dinner after all. I'd better tell Nora to hold dinner back. [*She half rises from her chair, but receives a kick from* TOM *which brings her down suddenly.*]

TOM. Oh, I wouldn't do that, Flora! They'll probably all go to the club for dinner and play bridge afterward.

JANE. Probably they'll all go to a show. I remember how fond Gerald used to be of a good show before he—settled down.

FLORA. Settled down? Do you find Gerald settled down?

JANE. Oh, yes, awfully! He used to be the life of the party.

FLORA [*Weakly*]. Oh!

TOM. Oh, well, we all settle down. Look at me! Why, I've become a head-gardener.

FLORA. And *such* a gardener! [*To Jane.*] Aren't these roses lovely? Tom is always *so* kind about remembering my favorite flowers. [JANE *glares. A motor horn is heard and noise of a machine in the drive. They all listen. The horn blows.*]

FLORA [*Clapping her hands*]. There's Gerald now! [TOM *kicks her under the table and she collapses, leaning across toward him and laughing a bit hysterically.*] What did you say, Tom?

TOM. I said "the crumbs are falling," Flora. [FLORA *and* TOM *laugh at each other significantly across the table.* JANE *looks for crumbs and then watches them suspiciously.* GERALD *comes running up the path.*]

GERALD. Hello, everybody! [*He enters the porch.*] Hello, Jane! [*He shakes hands with* JANE.] Hello, Tom, old boy! Wish you many happy returns of the day! [*He shakes* TOM's *hand and slaps him on the back.*]

TOM [*Significantly, rising*]. Same to you. [GERALD *starts, looks round, finds* FLORA *looking fixedly at* TOM, *recovers himself and says lightly,*] Thank you!

Yes, just three years ago tonight, wasn't it, Floey? Truth is, I was trying to fool Flora. Thought she wouldn't remember the date. [FLORA *looks at* TOM, *and laughs.*]

JANE. You mean you remembered your anniversary?

TOM. Why, of course, he did. I've been telling Flora that for the last hour.

GERALD. Of course.

FLORA. Then you're not dining with Joe Briggs?

GERALD. No, indeed! I should say not! I told Joe: "Why, old man, I wouldn't miss this anniversary with my wife for a cool thousand."

FLORA [*Bursting into laughter and controlling herself with difficulty*]. Did—ha-ha!—did the rest go?

GERALD. Yes, oh, yes! Of course, the rest did. [*He senses something in the situation.*] Why, what's up? What's the matter?

JANE. Nothing, only I saw you not half an hour ago at the Flyer, accepting regrets from Joe Briggs that he couldn't give you the dinner.

[GERALD *looks quickly at* FLORA *and sees that the jig is up. She bursts into peals of laughter, jumps up and runs around to* TOM, *catching him by the hand.*]

FLORA. Isn't it a funny old world, Tom dear! Isn't it a funny old world! [*She laughs.*] Come, Tom, come help me bring the things for Gerald. [*She pulls him into the house, still laughing immoderately.* GERALD *stares after her in amazement.*]

JANE [*Tensely*]. See that, Gerald, see that? Do

you realize what's going on here, right under our very noses?

GERALD [*Still puzzled*]. No, what?

JANE. My husband is falling in love with your wife.

GERALD. No!

JANE. He *is!* I tell you, he *is!* I've seen it with my own eyes. I came home just in time. They were having a tête-à-tête dinner here when I returned suddenly, and found them. He has eyes only for her.

GERALD. I don't blame him.

JANE. Eh? What's that?

GERALD. Sorry! I beg your pardon.—I mean—oh, hang it all, Jane, it can't be!

JANE. I tell you it *is*.

GERALD. Do you mean to say that she——

JANE [*Nodding*]. Calls him "big boy" and all that sickening stuff.

GERALD. And he——?

JANE. Oh, swallows it whole. Men *are* such idiots!

GERALD. Eh? What's that?

JANE. Sorry! What's the matter with us, Gerald?

GERALD. Matter? With us? Nothing—that is——

JANE. We've left them alone too much—eh? Do you think so?

GERALD. Evidently not *alone*—but *together*.

JANE. Hummm! He—dining with her—while I'm off lecturing. Fancy that!

GERALD [*Drawing a long breath*]. Guess we de-

serve it—at least, I do—leaving a sweet little thing like Flora alone so much.

JANE. Yes, and for nothing but an old golf game. Now I——

GERALD. Yes, you! You're doing this uplift stuff. Hum! Must be hot stuff for a lonesome husband!

JANE. Then you think that I——?

GERALD. I think you're playing a dangerous game; uplifting an indifferent world and depressing a devoted husband.

JANE. And *I* think you are liable to win a low golf score at the expense of high alimony. [*They glare at each other a moment, then* GERALD *laughs uneasily.*]

GERALD. Jane, we're a couple of idiots.

JANE. We are.

GERALD. Let's cut out the gadding, Jane—[*He extends his hand*]—let's cut it out.

JANE [*Shaking hands*]. Let's!

GERALD [*Pacing*]. I'm in an awful mess, Jane, about this anniversary. I plumb forgot it till Tom said: "same to you," and then I tried to lie out of it, and you gave me away, confound you!

JANE. Sorry, Gerald.

GERALD. Do—do you think she caught on?

JANE. *Do I?* Do you think she's an idiot, too?

GERALD. Damn! [*He plunges his hands in his pockets and paces furiously. Suddenly he stops and feels something in his pocket, finally pulling out a ring-box, which he holds toward* JANE.] Lord! here's that engagement ring Joe asked me to race ahead and get

for him to give the girl. Had to get Jenkins to open up for me. Now he's off without it. Isn't that the deuce?

JANE [*Suddenly intent*]. Is it a diamond?

GERALD. Sure. A big beauty.

JANE. I know what to do with it, Gerald.

GERALD. Eh? What?

JANE. Give it to Flora for an anniversary present, and let Joe buy his own ring.

GERALD. Jane, you're a peach. I'll do it. Hush! Here they come.

FLORA [*She enters bearing the things for* GERALD'S *set-up, which she quickly lays at the lower end of the table.* TOM *follows with the chair, which he places*]. Thank you, Tom, I wouldn't know how to keep house without you. [*She smiles at* TOM. JANE *and* GERALD *exchange glances.*]

TOM [*Smiling back*]. That's right, Flora. I'm sure it's a pleasure to serve you.

FLORA. Now come, let's all sit down to dinner. [*They do so.*] Oh! I forgot to tell Nora to serve. I'll try this bell again. [*She pushes hard on the buzzer, which goes off like a fire alarm. She laughs hysterically.*] You see, Tom, it *will* ring *when everybody's here.*

TOM. That's right. [*They smile at each other across the table.* GERALD *and* JANE *exchange glances.*]

FLORA [*To* NORA, *who has appeared in the doorway*]. You may serve the soup now, Nora.

NORA. Plaze, mum, the soup's all biled away. [*There is a pause. Everybody laughs.*]

FLORA. Then bring the roast, Nora.

NORA. Sure, I've hild back th' roast till 'tis burnt to a crisp, mum. [*There is another pause and a laugh.*]

FLORA [*Hysterically*]. Well, Nora, bring whatever is left.

NORA. Yis, mum. [*She goes out.*]

TOM. While we are waiting, perhaps our dear hostess will allow me to present to my dear wife this little anniversary present. [*He hands his box to* JANE, *who hastily opens it and gives a cry of delight.*]

JANE. A bar-pin! A diamond bar-pin! Oh, Tom, darling, what a beauty! [*She holds up the pin with her right hand and reaches her left along the table to* TOM, *who takes it rapturously.*]

GERALD. And perhaps our dear hostess will allow *me* to present to *my* dear wife *this* little anniversary present.

FLORA. Gerald! You *did* remember after all? You darling! [*Opening box.*] A ring! A diamond ring! Oh, Gerald.

NORA [*Entering with cake, with three candles, lighted, upon it. She bears down triumphantly upon the table, holding it aloft, and stops at the left of her mistress, facing front.*] Sure, th' annyvars'ry's lift, mum. Ain't it beautiful! I fixed th' candles three-cornered-like. 'Tis a thryangle, mum.

ALL [*Springing to their feet*]. A triangle? NO! [*They all laugh uncertainly. Then* JANE *calls* "TOM" *and he* "JANE," *and* FLORA *and* GERALD *do likewise, flying to each other's arms.* GERALD *and* FLORA *at the right of the table, and* JANE *and* TOM left. NORA *steps to the table, and stands beaming at the cake, into which she sets the knife.*]

NORA. Sure, mum, the crumbs does be fallin' somethin' awful, mum.

FLORA AND TOM [*Turning toward her*]. Crumbs? Falling? [*They point at each other and laugh.*]

JANE AND GERALD [*Looking questioningly across at each other*]. Crumbs?

FLORA [*Laughing and running to take the knife away from* NORA]. Who's willing to eat crumbs? [*She flourishes the knife.*]

JANE AND GERALD. I am. [*They move up toward the table on either side, and each takes up a plate and holds it out for cake.*]

FLORA [*To* TOM]. Shall we let them?

TOM. Sure! Who licks the crumbs that fall his way shall live to lick another day.

[FLORA *serves the cake, as they all settle into their places at table, talking and laughing together.*]

CURTAIN.

RADIO [1]

A Serious Comedy

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CHARACTERS

Jim Stewart, 30, farmer.

Mamie Stewart, 25, his wife, formerly a manicure girl from Chicago.

Ted Connelly, 35, machinery salesman and mechanician. He has come to America in his late 'teens and has the lilt of the south of Ireland on his tongue.

RADIO

TIME: *The present,—seven o'clock of a July evening.*

PLACE: *A new farm on the plains of western Kansas.*

The kitchen of a new farmhouse. Through the open western door and window at the back of the room the setting sun sweeps in, gilding all the ugliness. The right-hand wall holds first: a door to an inner room, then big hooks on the wall, and down stage a rude dresser for dishes. The left-hand wall has, beginning up stage: a washbasin on a bench with a ragged, soiled towel and a cracked bit of mirror hanging above it; a cook-stove; and down front, a work-table with a dish-pan, pail of water with a dipper, etc. Over the table is a shelf with a cheap alarm-clock, a tin cup and a lamp. A small window is at extreme front. There is a small rocking chair. At center front is the eating table spread with a soiled red cloth and set forth with places for two. A bread-board and loaf and knife are on the table. As the curtain rises, MAMIE *is discovered seated left end of table with* TED CONNELLY *seated opposite her. He is in mechanics' jeans which are grease-spotted, but is, himself, very clean and alert. He wears a whimsical expression.* MAMIE

is in slatternly dress with untidy hair and apron. She has been a pretty woman, but now wears a look of deep sullenness which makes her almost ugly.

MAMIE. So that's the way you brought the harvester out—by the tractor? Have another slice of bread? [*She takes up the knife to cut the slice.*]

TED. Thank ye, Mrs. Stewart, I've had plenty. I hear the good man a-comin'. He was bound to be finishin' the near field a-fore dark. [*Calling.*] Hey! man, dear, how did the harvester and tractor work for ye? [*He rises and goes toward the door.*]

JIM [*Entering. He is big and handsome, dressed in soiled jeans and shirt, with the throat open. His hands are soiled and he looks weary and worried.*] All right, Connelly. Wish you'd take a look at her before you go, though. I'm not sure that binding-cord is adjusted just right.

TED. I will that. I'll be doin' it now while 'tis sun-up. [*He exits.* JIM *slouches to the wall-hook right, takes off his straw hat and hangs it up with a weary sigh.*]

MAMIE. All wore out, ain't ye, Jim? [*She is at work at the table.*]

JIM. No. [*He slouches to the door and looks out as if watching Connelly.*]

MAMIE. The heat's been awful. Was afraid you'd get sun-stroke out there. Ain't ye hot?

JIM. No. [*He turns into the room.*] Where's the washbasin?

MAMIE. On the bench where it always is. Can't you see?

JIM. Yes. [*He takes the basin from the bench and goes to the pail on the table to fill it. He puts one dipperful from the pail into the basin. As he starts to take the second, she speaks.*]

MAMIE. Here! Look out what you're doing there! Be saving of that water, there's only a few more pailfuls in the barrel.

JIM. All right! [*He goes back to the bench with his scantily filled basin and begins to wash.*]

MAMIE. Can't you fill the barrel tomorrow, Jim?

JIM. No.

MAMIE. How am I going to do the work without water?—tell me that. You got to harvest all day tomorrow?

JIM [*Wiping on the soiled and ragged towel.*] Yes.

MAMIE. Can't you eat your supper now?—everything's all hot.

JIM. No. Got to see to things a bit first. [*He starts for the door.*]

MAMIE. Your supper'll spoil, Jim, and I had it so nice for you. Can't you eat first? I'm so tired over this hot stove.

JIM [*At the door*]. No.

MAMIE [*High-pitched*]. Yes—no—yes—no—yes—no! I declare, Jim Stewart, a body might as well be living with a deaf-mute as with you. [*He stands at the door, looking out, but says nothing. She loses*

patience.] Don't you know I'm lonesome, Jim? I got nobody to talk to all day long. Seems like the silence is splitting my ears open, sometimes. Why can't you talk to me?

JIM. I'm thinking.

MAMIE. Thinking! Gee! I've thought all my thoughts up and down and criss-cross, till I'm near crazy. I'm terrible lonely, Jim! [*She chokes back a sob.*]

JIM [*Impatiently*]. Aw! don't begin on that again! [*He steps through the door and exits without a glance at her.*]

MAMIE [*Calling*]. Jim! Jim! [*She runs to the door and looks out after him, then, with a gesture of despair, she turns heavily back to the room again and looks dully about her. Her face hardens.* CONNELLY *enters.*]

TED. Excuse me to be runnin' away without me manners, please. Me mind was on the machine entirely. And let me be thankin' ye for the supper. 'Tis a fine cook ye are, and me that's traveled the length and breadth of western Kansas to be tellin' ye. Sure, I've sold machinery to all the farmers hereabout, and eaten so many fried eggs-and-bacon that me insides need copper-rivetin', like me machines. [*He has taken out "the makings."*] Care if I smoke, Lady of the House?

MAMIE [*Clearing*]. A cigarette? Lord, no! Smells good to me. Takes me back to the College Inn.

TED. [*Sauntering to the doorway and leaning*

against the jamb as he smokes]. Chicago, is it? Come from there, Lady? Some town, that!

MAMIE. I'll tell the world. Gee! I'd rather wait table in a hash-joint on Halsted Street than live in a palace out here. [*She looks over the room contemptuously.*] A palace like this here Eye-talian villa of mine.

TED. Yer not after likin' Kansas, Lady? Ah, well! 'tis not a bad place when yer mind's at rest. Like now, whin the wheat's ripe and a-wavin' in the breeze, 'tis a golden sea with the waves a-rollin'. 'Tis thin it takes the heart of a man with its beauty, Lady.

MAMIE [*Banging the dishes into the pan*]. Beauty, huh? 'Tis a beauty my eyes are blind to, Mr. Connelly.

TED. Sure, there's many a thing our eyes are blind to, and many a song our ears do lack. How long since you left Chicago, I wonder?

MAMIE. Came out to Topeka six years ago,—fool that I was! Left Madam Jenny's Beauty Parlors to do it, too. Madam Jenny told me I was plumb crazy.

TED. Why Topeka?

MAMIE. Had a married sister living there. Life around Madam Jenny's was getting a bit too gay to suit me, so I—well, I thought I'd get out while the getting was good. I'd saved most of my tips—nearly $500 and I thought I'd set up in business in Topeka. Lord! can you beat that for a bone-head? Topeka.

TED. Sure, there's many a worse place than Topeka, Lady. You'll be after missin' the theaters, and

the bright lights, and the places where the world does be eatin' in time with the music, God hilp them! You look like one would yearn for it.

MAMIE. Do I, now? 'Twas a gay fling while it lasted, anyhow. Swell joints to eat at and never mind the bill. Out-of-town customers often like some one to keep them company at dinner, you see, and we girls got many a beefsteak so. 'Twas better than an egg over a gas-jet any day. Yes, give me the bright lights! Not many of 'em here.

TED. [*Blowing smoke-rings at the moon*]. No. Just the moon,—a new, silver one, tipped like a wee bit of a boat. That means rain. She'll be spillin' buckets o' water soon. Yer man'll have to hasten to git his crops in a-fore she slips, I'm a-thinkin'.

MAMIE [*Dully*]. We won't make the grade. He's been a-workin' day and night all summer till he's that tired he can't speak to a body. I might as well be living with a deaf-mute for all the company he is. Why should any one live such a life,—tell me that.

TED. It's all in the way you look at it, Lady. To you, a-yearnin' for the city, this looks drab; but can't ye be guessin' the look of it to an eye that says, " 'Tis me Kingdom out yonder, as far as the eye can reach. 'Tis me Kingdom—mine—mine!"

MAMIE. Well, it just happens it's part mine, Mr. Connelly. I was fool enough to put my money into the land when I married Jim.

TED. 'Twas a good thing to do, Lady. There's naught like a bit o' land that's belongin' to ye,—yer

very own. There's not many a half-section hereabout the like of this one. 'Tis on Ea-zy Street ye'll be some day.

MAMIE. Jim'll never make it.

TED. He will so—give him half a chance. He's been tryin' to do more'n one man's work, that's all. He had great need of that harvester and tractor I brought out today.

MAMIE. Hump!

TED. We've been a-cuttin' all the afternoon, Lady, and she goes through the wheat like a hot knife through butter. With the help of the harvester and tractor, he'll be makin' a go of it, surely. 'Tis a good thing he bought it.

MAMIE. *Bought* it! You mean rented, don't you?

TED. I do not. He's bought it.

MAMIE. Where'd he get the money?

TED. Oh! 'twas easy to be arranged, and him the master of many acres.

MAMIE. Going to mortgage the place, I'll bet. Ha! mortgage my Eye-talian villa—me Crown Jewels! [*She laughs.*] Is *that* it? [*He smokes silently.*] For how much? [*He does not reply.*] Hump! Cost a lot—more'n a thousand, I'll bet.

TED. She'll earn back for ye all the money she cost, Lady. Sure and a man has great need of the best of tools if he's to carry on alone with naught but his two hands.

MAMIE. How about a woman? I can't even have a whole dish-pan,—it leaks.

TED. Softly, Lady, softly! Don't be after givin' way like that. Send out yer Ship o' Faith, and some day she'll come a-sailin' back to ye, treasure-laden. Some day you'll be rich.

MAMIE. Some day—when? "A rag and a bone and a hank of hair,"—that's what I'll be when we get rich. Give me the bright lights—*now.*

TED. Ye don't know yer good fortune. Ye're better off in God's clean air, with a good man to work for ye, than ever ye were in the great city with men the likes of——

MAMIE. What do you know about *them?* There was no harm in 'em,—leastwise they never harmed *me.* A lot you know! Why! those rich guys thought nothing of giving me half-dollar tips. 'Twas come easy—go easy. I even got presents of flowers, sometimes—*roses!* [*Pause.*] Gee! I ain't seen a rose—not since I came out here. [*Longer pause.*] It wasn't so bad before my baby died.

TED [*Throwing away his cigarette butt and coming into the room*]. Ye've lost a child, Lady? Tch-tch-tch! 'Tis a loss indeed! Well, I must be a-gettin' home now to see me own Johneen a-fore he falls asleep.

MAMIE [*Hungry for sympathy*]. Mine was a little girl, all soft and cuddly. Oh-o! [*She breaks into a smothered sob.*]

TED. A little girl, ye say, Lady? Well, girls are nice too. I must be a-goin' on. Me Johneen likes me to be a-rockin', and singin' to him at sundown.

MAMIE. Like Baby—just like Baby! I used to sit in that rocking chair every night about this time and rock and sing to her. A pretty song it was— I heard it in a theater once,—all about a Slumber Boat.

TED. Why! 'tis the song me boy likes, too. Like this? [*He sings, softly.*]

"Sail, baby, sail, out upon that sea;
Only don't forget to sail back again to me."

MAMIE [*Whispering*]. That's it. That's the song. Baby loved it. Now—she's dead—dead,—and I'm dead too, since she left me.

TED. Now, Lady, 'tis empty yer arms are, I know; but it's a long way ye are from bein' dead. What yer needin' is to be in touch with the world again.

MAMIE [*Bitterly*]. Yes—yes! It's a box at the opera I'm needing,—I am!

TED. Ye think ye're alone out here. Ye're not. There's millions of wonderful sounds a-passin' yer ears this very minute, if only ye were in tune with 'em.

MAMIE. In tune?

TED. That's what they call it, Lady,—"tunin' in." Have ye heard of radio?

MAMIE. Radio? Something like a telephone, ain't it?

TED. Something like—without the need of wires. I've a grand notion to be settin' ye up one here, at this window. [*Steps outside door.*]

MAMIE. What could I hear?

TED [*Reappearing with radio outfit and beginning to adjust it at the window down left front*]. Oh! everything; speeches, plays, music.

MAMIE. Music? Really?

TED. Sure! See? This one here is just one I made for me wife. I'll set her up for ye and ye'll *really* be havin' a box at the opera.

MAMIE [*Watching him at work, fascinated*]. Sounds like faking. Remember, I've been buried out here five years—dead and buried.

TED. Even the dead may hear this, I'm thinkin'. 'Tis not so easy to explain it, Lady. Ye see, the whole world's vibration,—light, heat, sound, everything. As I do be speakin' to ye now, I'm a-startin' vibrations that—well, who knows where they *do* be reachin'?

MAMIE. But without wires—I don't understand.

TED. Lady dear, if one really understood it all, he'd understand God Himself. Leastwise, that's how *I* feel about it. 'Twill be keepin' ye company whin ye're lonely. Ye'll be after hearin' things from all over this world—and mebbe the next. Listen!

[*He makes an adjustment. A buzzing noise is heard, which quickly develops into a dance tune.*]

Harken to that, will ye! We picked that right out of the Hivens. [*He continues to adjust.* MAMIE *stands transfixed, drinking it in. She smiles, whips off her apron and runs her fingers through her hair. It is the transformation of a sodden woman into a joyful girl. She stretches her arms over her head with abandon and draws a long breath. Now she sways to the music,*

clapping her hands softly and whispering to herself. Then she begins to dance, kicking off her heavy shoes and dancing in her stocking feet. At first she is unaccustomed, but this falls from her and she dances with more and more abandon till she is a faun dancing to Pan's pipes, oblivious to all but the music. TED's *back is to her and he is absorbed in the adjustment of the machine. As the music ends, she leans panting against the table and falls into a chair.*]

TED [*Turning to her with a grin*]. D'ye like it, Lady?

MAMIE [*Gasping*]. Like it—like it! You don't know—you can't know! It's—oh! it's all the things I've wanted—Oh-o-o-o! [*A long rapturous sigh.*]

TED [*With a last look at it*]. Ye'll not be lonely now, I'm thinkin'. [*He closes his kit which has had some of his tools in it.*] The black dusk is comin' on and I must be trampin' along. Good-by to ye!

MAMIE [*Springing up*]. Oh, wait! wait! I—it's wonderful—but—but I've no money——

TED. And did ye think it was for the money I was doin' it, Lady? It squeezed the heart o' me to see ye so out-o'-tune like. I thought if once ye got the swing of the rhythm, mayhap ye'd git back to livin' agin. Put up yer money, Lady. I'll buy the stuff and make another for herself. 'Tis little the stuff cost me.

MAMIE [*Running to the shelf and taking down the cup*]. Wait—wait! At least I can pay for the stuff for hers. See,—it's my egg money.

TED I don't like to be takin' it. [*She pours the small change from the cup into his hands.*]

MAMIE. Take it—you must! You can't know what it means to me. Do I have to do anything to make it go?

TED [*Demonstrating*]. This turns it off and this turns it on. I'm leavin' it adjusted for Chicago. As for makin' it go—'tis the universe makes her go, Lady, and God's attendin' to that. Good-by! God bless ye all!

MAMIE. So long! And thank you a thousand times. [*Listening*]. Hark! there's Jim coming in from the chores. Don't tell him, please! I want to surprise him. [*She runs to the shelf and puts back the cup.*]

JIM's voice outside. Hello! Connelly, you still here?

TED [*At the door with his kit*]. Yes. I'll be runnin' along now.

JIM's voice. It's getting dark fast. Them roads to town is two-foot-deep in mud. It's not a nice ride in the dark.

TED [*Stepping out through the door, where* JIM *joins him*]. I'm off. There's a new moon in the Hivens will see me home, I'm thinkin'. The stars and me are good friends. Send me word if the machine runs over ye. Good luck to ye! [*He disappears, and the sound of his motor is heard starting and disappearing.*]

JIM [*Still standing in the doorway, watching Connelly off, silhouetted black against the orange sky.*] So long, Connelly! [*He turns and enters.*]

MAMIE. Well, you ready to eat now?

JIM. Yes. [*He goes to the bench and again washes his hands in the water he left in the basin.*] Want this water throwed any special place?

MAMIE. Yes. On that matrimony-vine outside the door there,—though I don't know as it's any use—the poor thing can't live in this awful place anyway. [JIM *takes the basin and empties it just outside the door, near the house.*] Connelly tells me you've *bought* that harvester and tractor.

JIM. Yes. Had to have it. One man can't run a farm like this alone.

MAMIE. No. Nor one woman. [*She lights the lamp and puts it on the table.*]

JIM [*Seating himself at the right-hand end of table and beginning to eat*]. Aw! come on, now, Mame, if I get a good price for the wheat, I'll buy you——

MAMIE. A new dish-pan, eh? Don't make your promises too extravagant.

JIM. Cut out the sob stuff. I'm tired of it. You're always grouching. This all there is to eat?

MAMIE [*Slicing bread*]. Oh, no! There's Lobster Newburg and Café Parfait waiting for the gentleman when he's finished his mushroom soup.

JIM. Cut it out, will you! I'm tired,—been at it since sun-up.

MAMIE. Me—I ain't done a thing all day but ride around in me Rolls-Royce. [*She bangs the coffee-pot on the table.*]

JIM [*Trying to slip his arm around her as she pours his coffee*]. Gee! Mame, mebbe some day we'll have one. Some day we'll show 'em, eh?

MAME [*Pushing away from him*]. Show 'em what? D'ye suppose the old hag I'll be then will care *what* she has? Look at me, Jim Stewart, I ain't had a new dress since I came to ye.

JIM [*Carelessly*]. Look grand to me, Mame. What's looks, anyway?

MAMIE. You thought different five years ago. You had a long song to sing then about looks—*my* looks.

JIM [*Brutally*]. Well, I don't care about 'em now, I'll tell you. All I care about is to get in this wheat and get a good price for it. This year I'll be out of debt. Next year you shall have all the new clothes you want.

MAMIE. *Next year!* Wait till *next year!* This rag I've got on is the last thing I own.

JIM. Buy yourself one then. You've been saving the egg-money—how much have you got there? [*He rises from the table.*]

MAMIE. None of your business.

JIM. Mebbe not, but let's see, anyway. [*He lounges over toward the shelf.*]

MAMIE [*Stepping between*]. You leave that cup alone, Jim Stewart.

JIM [*Putting her aside*]. What's all the excitement? [*He takes down the cup and looks into it,—his face changes.*] What the h—? [*He looks at his wife suspiciously.*] Where's all the money gone?

MAMIE [*Laughing hardly*]. *All* the money? Oh! I been buying me a Russian sable opera cloak.

JIM [*Slowly putting the cup back*]. What you done with that there money? Tell me.

MAMIE. Jim, I can't stand it—I can't, I tell you. Come on,—let's get out of here. It's killing me, Jim.

JIM. What did you spend that money for? Tell me.

MAMIE. For something I wanted—wanted so! Please, Jim, if you've any love left for me, take me away from here. I want to go back to Chicago.

JIM. Chicago! What would *I* be doing in Chicago?

MAMIE. Oh, anything! I'd get you a job, never fear. I've still got friends there; and I'd go back to my old place at Madam Jenny's. Come on, Jim, let's go.

JIM. You're crazy! Leave my farm, just when she's cleaning up? Not much!

MAMIE. *Your* farm! I like that! I put just as much money into this farm as you did. My own money, too; earned with my own hands.

JIM. The hands of the "idle rich" you mean. Gosh! my blood boils when I think of you a-holding the hands of them fat slobs.

MAMIE. Huh! You was glad enough to get their

money to buy this land. I was a fool to give it to you. Wish I had it back. I could do with some money now.

JIM [*Returning to the charge*]. What have you done with *this* money? Where is it?

MAMIE. Spent.

JIM. What for? You've not been out of this house, have you?

MAMIE. Not in a million years.

JIM. Then what have you spent it for? [*The radio begins to hum.*]

MAMIE [*With triumph*]. For *that.* [*She indicates the instrument, which has run into jazz.*] It's my new radio.

JIM. Radio?

MAMIE. Yes. Ain't ye heard about 'em? Like a wireless telephone—just in the air—vibrations, Mr. Connelly called 'em. It's the vibrations from Chicago we're getting—listen! [*The jazz ripples along.* MAMIE'S *face lights up, and she hums the melody as she begins to sway.*] Gee! Ain't it swell?

JIM [*Puzzled*]. D'ye mean that music we're hearing is happening——?

MAMIE [*Nodding*]. In Chicago. Un-hum! At some place where folks are dancing and having a good time. Oh! Jimmy, let's go—let's go! Let's leave this horrible place and *go*, Jimmy, please! I can't stand it any longer—I can't—I can't—I really can't. It's so terribly lonely here since Baby died.

JIM [*Suddenly softened*]. Poor little woman! It

is hard for you, and I'm sorry. If only she'd lived. If only she were here—now! [*The radio stops.*]

MAMIE. Baby *here—HERE*, in this awful heat—this god-forsaken place! Thank Heaven she's not—thank Heaven she's not!

JIM. Mame! Stop! I—I could choke you for that! It's a terrible loss—to me.

MAMIE. To you? To—*YOU?* Do you think you loved that baby the way I did—I, her own Mother? My heart's a black hole since she went; and my arms are aching for the feel of her, but—BUT—when I remember her last days, lying there gasping with the ghastly heat; no place to keep her food cool; no water to keep her decently clean—God in Heaven! I'm glad she's out of it,—I wish I was too.

JIM. Mame! Mame! [*He drops into a chair by the table and throws his head down upon his outstretched arms. She bends over him an instant, tempted to comfort him, but the radio begins, and she starts. As she listens, her expression changes completely.*]

MAMIE [*Bending over her husband's bent head*]. Listen, Jim, listen! [*A waltz ripples out.*] Can't you just imagine it? I can see the little white tables, the pink-shaded lights, the people eating expensive food. The orchestra is playing, and the men are laughing and talking to their ladies,—saying pretty things—pretty things, Jim. See how bright their eyes shine,—brighter than the jewels on the ladies' bare throats!

Smell the roses, feel the silks—the velvets—the furs! That's the way it is there, and we—? I sit here in this rag and you opposite me, day after day—day after day, and not a word out of you except about the crops. [*The music has ended in a wild crescendo.*] I'll not stand it another minute, I tell you. I'll not—I'll not!

JIM [*Rising slowly*]. What do you reckon you'll do?

MAMIE. I'm going back to Chicago, where I belong. If you want to spend your life stuck down in this hole, you may,—but you'll do it alone. As for the money I put in here,—it's yours—I make you a present of it—only—I GO.

JIM. Mame! You don't mean it? You're talking through your hat?

MAMIE. Not mean it? Say! listen here, Jim Stewart, I never meant anything more in all my life.

JIM. Mame! You wouldn't go off and leave me! You're my wife, Mame. You're married to me. You promised to love, honor and obey me. You can't go off and leave me like you say. Don't—don't you love me any more, Mame?

MAMIE [*With a bitter laugh*]. Love! Love! Seems to me I *have* heard that word before, way back in the dark ages when you asked me to marry you. I ain't heard it for so long I forgot it *was*. What do *you* know about *love?*

JIM. A man's got no time for love-talk when he's working a half-section alone.

MAMIE. And a woman's got no time to be waiting

for him to finish before he makes love to her again. Let me tell you, Jim Stewart, if you'd a-cared like you said you did "in sickness and in health, for better, for worse," I could a-stood all the rest,—but I can't stand this.

JIM. I've loved you all right, but——

MAMIE. BUT!—you had to be thinking of plowing and planting and hoeing. I'll bet my everlasting soul, Jim, you ain't *really* thought of me since you put in that wheat.

JIM. I was doing it all for you, Mame.

MAMIE. You was not. You'd do the same if I died tonight. Well, just think of me as dead, Jim, for I'm a-going.

JIM. How'll you go? I've got no money, and you've spent all yours for that fool thing [*Indicating the radio*].

MAMIE [*Smiling like a Mona Lisa*]. Oh, no, Jim! not *all*. I had saved money for Baby,—thinking to spend it on her first Christmas. I've not touched it. I—I couldn't. 'Twill take me to Chicago, Jim, and once *there*—[*The radio begins again, and she laughs.*] Listen to it calling me, Jim—listen! [*She dances.*]

JIM. You shall not go, I tell you. D'ye think I'll have my wife a-holding the greasy hands of them idle loafers? D'ye think I'm going to stand for *that?* God! I could murder every one of them! [*To the radio.*] Shut up, you blasted thing! Shut up! [*He picks up the hatchet from the wood-box and starts toward the radio.*] I'll fix ye! I'll show ye!

MAMIE. [*Screams*]. Stop! Stop! What are you going to do, Jim?

JIM [*Brandishing the hatchet*]. I'm going to smash that damn box if it's the last thing I ever do on earth.

MAMIE [*Snatching up the bread-knife*]. Don't you dare—don't you dare! [*She raises the knife.*] Touch that—and—I'll——

JIM [*Gasping*]. Mame! Mame! [*Suddenly the radio changes and a deep contralto voice begins to sing the Slumber Boat.*[1]]

MAMIE [*Dropping the knife to the floor*]. Hark! Hark!—Baby's song, Jim—Baby's song! [*They listen tensely for a moment, then he drops the hatchet, and she totters to his arms.*] Oh! Jim—Jim! [*She sobs on his breast while he comforts her. The light outside, which has been gradually dusking, is by this time deep, dark blue, with stars showing. Now the silver crescent of the moon appears framed in the doorway.*]

JIM. Poor old Mame! Poor old girl!

MAME [*Looking up at him*]. He said, "vibrations from all over this world—maybe the next"— Jim, oh, Jim! maybe 'tis a message from——

JIM [*Laying his head against hers*]. Maybe it is, dear. Who knows?

SLOW CURTAIN.

[1] Note: The song, "The Slumber Boat," by Riley-Gaynor, is published by Clayton F. Summy Co., 429 So. Wabash Ave., Chicago. It may be had on a Victor Record,—an easy way to use it in the play.

THE BLACK SUITCASE [1]

A Farce

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Cast of Characters in Order of Their Appearance

Mother, a gentle tyrant.
Bridget, maid of all work and family friend.
Father, respectable and established citizen.
Bootlegger.
Housebreaker.
Sis, daughter of the family, a boarding-school miss.
Bud, son of the family, a senior at High.
Jack Plummer, friend of Bud's, also at High.
Voice of Taxi-Driver heard off.
Terrence, plain-clothes man and cousin to Bridget.

THE BLACK SUITCASE

TIME: *Christmas Eve, 1923.*

PLACE: *Suburb of any large, mid-west, American city.*

Note: The BOOTLEGGER, HOUSEBREAKER, TAXIMAN *and* TERRENCE *may all be played by the same person, but in such case great care must be taken with make-up as the audience* must not *think them the same.*

SCENE. *The comfortable living-room of a family in good circumstances. At rear right, a door opens into an entry which leads to the front door [right] off stage. This front door is supposed to give upon the front porch of the house.*

In the center of rear wall a large wardrobe closet, with double doors [practicable] or curtains, takes care of the family wraps. In default of this a screen and costumer will serve. Rear left, a door opens to the dining-room and the service part of the house. A push-button by this door lights all the electric lights.

In the left wall, beginning up stage, is a door leading by an enclosed stairway to the chambers of the house. Next below this is a fireplace with a fire burning. A clock and candles and Christmas greens are on the mantel-shelf. A divan stands out into the room at right angles to the upper casing of the fireplace, thus screening the lower part of the upper left corner

of the room, where the bottles are finally smashed [*supposedly*]. *A shawl hangs on the back of the divan and a small table at the room end of it holds a sewing basket. Below the fireplace, quite close to the wall, is a large chair; and at extreme front left is the door leading to* MOTHER'S *room.*

In the right wall, beginning up stage, is a window giving upon the front porch. This has heavy drawcurtains which are practicable. This must be either a French window or must have a practicable lower sash which raises. Below the window and opposite the fireplace is a table with a lower shelf. It has a cover which hangs down to conceal this. At extreme right front is the door into SIS'S *room.*

A table, large enough for a man to hide under, is at center right. The table is covered with a large cloth which hangs well down all round. Upon it are books, magazines and many packages done up elaborately in white paper with red ribbon, evidently Christmas packages. These are piled at exactly the right spot so that two pulls of the cloth will bring them tumbling at the lower end of the table. Christmas greens are about, and the room has a holiday aspect. MOTHER *is discovered at the sewing-table on the divan, sewing on a pretty gown and singing, "God rest you merry gentlemen," softly.*

BRIDGET [*Putting her head through the dining-room door*]. Plaze, mum, what o'clock is it?

MOTHER. Just half after five, Bridget. You'd better light up.

BRIDGET [*Coming into the room and snapping on the electrics*]. Yes, mum. I will, mum. Lights make it more Christmas-y, doesn't they, mum?

MOTHER. Yes, and this is going to be a jolly one,—with both children home. How is dinner coming on, Bridget?

BRIDGET. The worst o' it is, mum, we've naught fur th' puddin' sauce, niver a drop.

MOTHER. It doesn't matter much, Bridget.

BRIDGET. Matter! Indade an' it does, though, mum! Me Cousin Terrence, the policeman, were allus a-sayin', "—put a big stick into the puddin' sauce, Bridget." He's a fine man, is Terrence.

MOTHER. He sounds like a drinking man, Bridget.

BRIDGET. Well, no mum,—not drinkin', exactly, but he were allus fond o' wettin' his whistle, mum. He gets plenty of it these days, mum.

MOTHER. Plenty of liquor *these* days, Bridget! Surely not since the Volstead Act.

BRIDGET. Oh, yes, mum. You see, he's one o' these here fly dry cops.

MOTHER. Fly dry cops, Bridget! What in the world do you mean?

BRIDGET. One o' these here hooch sleuths, mum. Mostly plain clothes, he is. Oh, he ketches lots o' bootleggers with the goods, does Terrence.

MOTHER. But of course he destroys the liquor, Bridget.

BRIDGET [*Mock solemnity*]. Of course, mum!

MOTHER. As for the sauce,—take that bit of

brandy left in the decanter,—it's the last in the house.

BRIDGET. Brandy, mum! What would the Master be sayin'? Brandy—in puddin' sauce!

MOTHER. It's a safe place, anyway. Put it in, Bridget. Sis will be here on the six o'clock train, and Bud is bringing his new friend from High School, Mr. Plummer, home to dinner.

BRIDGET. Mr. Plummer? The fat one they calls the middle-push, mum?

MOTHER [*Puzzled, then smiling*]. Middle-push?—oh! you mean the center-rush. Is your table set, Bridget?

BRIDGET. Mostly, mum. But with company an' all, I doubt we've enough silver to go round.

MOTHER [*Listening to a whistle which sounds off*]. Hark! There's Father. Open the door, Bridget. He's sure to have his arms full. [FATHER's *whistle sounds again off.* BRIDGET *hurries to the door, opens it, and stands holding it open as* FATHER *enters, his arms piled high. She then follows him into the room after closing the door, and stands at the rear, listening, interested in all that affects the family.* FATHER *has a big bundle under his left arm, and a large box in his left hand, while the bundle made by three suitcases, done up together, is in his right.*]

FATHER. Hello! Merry Christmas!

BRIDGET. Merry Christmas, sorr!

MOTHER [*Rising and laying the dress on the divan as she goes to meet him*]. Merry Christmas, dear! You look like Santa Claus.

FATHER [*Dropping the big suitcase bundle beside the upper end of the table and placing the two others on top of it as he starts to remove his coat and hat*]. I am. Got everybody's presents here. [*Kisses* MOTHER.] How are you, Mother? Has any one been here for me this afternoon—or called up?

MOTHER. No, dear, I think not. *Has* any one been here, Bridget?

BRIDGET. No, mum. Not a soul, Mum.

FATHER. No phone message?

BRIDGET. No, sorr. [*She helps him off with his things and puts them away in the wardrobe.*]

FATHER. Hump! That's strange.

MOTHER. Why, dear, whom were you expecting?

FATHER. Oh, just a fellow on business. Now, Mother——

MOTHER [*Laughing*]. Yes, Father?

FATHER. Shall I give you your Christmas gift now —or wait? [*He evidently wants to give it to her.*]

MOTHER [*Understanding and smiling at him*]. I like to be surprised—but—give it to me.

FATHER. Good! Here it is. [*He hands her a box.*]

MOTHER [*Hefting the box and looking it over critically*]. By the shape of the box I suspect it came from Peacock's.

FATHER. Good guess.

MOTHER [*Beginning to undo it*]. Father! Oh, yum—yummy-yum! Is it?—it *is—silver!*

FATHER [*Pleased*]. Ummm-humm!

MOTHER [*With one roll out*]. Flat silver! You darling! [*She drops the roll in the box and runs to embrace* FATHER, *then back to the box again.*] How lovely! I've needed it so much. I'll open it at once for we lack silver to lay the dinner table. Jack Plummer, Bud's new friend, is coming to dinner with him, and is to take Sis to the party tonight. By the way, don't forget you are to meet Sis at the train.

FATHER [*Looking at his watch*]. Oh, yes, plenty of time yet.

MOTHER [*The silver spread for admiration*]. Oh, Father, how handsome! How gorgeous! How wonderful! [*Hefts a fork.*] *And heavy!* Oh, you nice, extravagant man! [*She hugs him again.*]

FATHER [*Pleased as Punch*]. Heaviest they had. Like 'em heavy, don't you?

MOTHER. I do—I do—indeed I do! [*She gloats over the silver and* FATHER *gloats over her.*]

BRIDGET [*Running to the window and drawing the shades*]. Sure, mum, be careful! You shouldn't be displaying of 'em with the shades open. They's been sneak-thieves about, mum. They broke into the Smithsons' at the corner last week. If only me Cousin Terrence were on this beat!

MOTHER. Sneak-thieves! Oh, Father! [*She makes a move to cover the silver.*]

FATHER [*Laughing*]. You needn't worry. They went to the Smithsons' for liquor.

MOTHER [*Also laughing*]. Liquor! Oh, well, in that case, *we* don't have to worry.

BRIDGET [*Mournfully*]. No, mum. Not wid th' last drop o' brandy goin' into the puddin' sauce.

FATHER [*Groaning*]. Brandy—in pudding sauce! What a crime!

BRIDGET. Yis, sorr! It *is*, sorr.

MOTHER. Why, Father, what would you do with it?

FATHER. Do—with brandy? Drink it, of course.

MOTHER. Drink it! What has come over you, Father? We've had brandy in pudding-sauce ever since we were married, and you never wanted to drink it. What's changed you?

FATHER. Volstead. [*He goes to the window, draws open the shade which Bridget closed, and peers out.*]

BRIDGET. Thrue for ye, sorr! 'Tis what me Cousin Terrence does be sayin'.

MOTHER [*Reproachfully*). Nonsense! Of course you're joking, Father, you—a pillar of the church. [*She selects certain pieces of silver and hands them to Bridget.*] Here, Bridget, here are the pieces you'll need for the table tonight. Better get it finished now, for the children will be here soon.

BRIDGET. Yis, mum, I will, mum. [BRIDGET *takes the pieces of silver and exits to the dining-room.*]

MOTHER. Shouldn't you start, Father? Sis's train will be in soon.

FATHER [*More and more nervous*]. In a minute. [*He goes to the window, looks out, and turns back, evidently disappointed.*] There's plenty of time yet.

MOTHER [*Poking the big bundle of suitcases*]. What's in this big bundle?

FATHER. That? Oh—I—I don't know whether to open that now or not.

MOTHER [*All curiosity*]. Why not?

FATHER [*Sheepishly*]. There's another present for you in there.

MOTHER. Another present for *me!* Why, you extravagant man!

FATHER. Shall I open it?

MOTHER [*Hesitant*]. I like to be surprised—but—open it.

FATHER [*Opening the bundle*]. Well, while doing my Christmas shopping this afternoon, I struck a sale of suitcases—black suitcases.

MOTHER. Suitcases!

FATHER [*A bit nettled*]. Yes. I remembered hearing the children—Sis, anyway—fuss about having to carry a shabby suitcase.

MOTHER. And so——?

FATHER. And so—I bought——

MOTHER [*Smiling*]. Two?

FATHER [*A bit doubtful of his wisdom*]. Three. One for Bud, one for sis, and one for you.

MOTHER [*Bursting into laughter*]. Three black suitcases, just alike? [*She sees Father's discomfiture and restrains her laughter.*]

FATHER [*Testily*]. Alike? Well, why not?

MOTHER. But—how shall we tell them apart?

FATHER [*A bit hurt*]. I'll have them marked after Christmas. Don't you like them?

MOTHER [*Contrite*]. Oh, yes, *very* much! Just

what we needed. You are such a thoughtful old dear. [*She kisses him to hide her amusement.*] Now, don't you think you ought to start for the train?

FATHER [*Prowling to the window again*]. Plenty of time yet. I say, Mother, isn't it too bad your brandy's all gone?

MOTHER [*Admiring her silver*]. Yes, dear, I *do* like it in the cooking. This is the loveliest pattern—and heavy!—and *heavy*—oh, my! how I need it!

FATHER [*Trying her out*]. Suppose I get you some?

MOTHER [*Lost in the silver*]. Get me some! More? Oh, no, dear, you've been so generous I've enough silver here to last me the rest of my life.

FATHER [*Glancing toward the window*]. I didn't say silver, dear—brandy. Suppose I get you some brandy?

MOTHER. Brandy! But you can't—now—since the Volstead——

FATHER. But if I could?

MOTHER. Bootlegging? Breaking the law? Certainly *not!*—Besides, they say it's very expensive.

FATHER [*Dryly*]. Yes, so they say.

MOTHER. I believe I would better hide this silver, just in case Bridget is right about the sneak-thieves. [*Looks about the room.*] I wonder—my new suitcase! Just the thing! I'll hide it in my suitcase. Let me see—which *is* mine? Eeny-meeny-miny-moo! I'll take this one. [*She chooses the outside suitcase —No. 3—which is* not *the one her count has indicated*

—places it forward of the others and kneels beside it on the floor.] Please hand me the silver, Father.

FATHER [*Handing down the rolls of silver*]. Here they are. Are you sure no one came for me today? [*He prowls to the window, sees someone outside whom he is evidently expecting, and makes motions to him to wait. He then turns back to the table and* MOTHER.]

MOTHER [*Quite oblivious*]. No one, dear. These really are lovely suitcases. I'm glad they're black, too. Black's so respectable.

FATHER [*Motioning to the person without*]. We must be respectable.

MOTHER. You know, I often look at a handsome suitcase and wonder what's inside it—whether it's disreputable contents might not give the lie to it's respectable exterior. Instead of clean shirts, it might be——

FATHER [*Trying* MOTHER *out again*]. It might be hooch?

MOTHER [*Shocked*]. Father! [*Closes the suitcase and places it on the* inside *just even with the fall of the table cover, but still in view of audience.*] There! I'll just put it here, dear, and after dinner you can put it away on my closet shelf for me.

FATHER. That'll be fine. Now—er—don't you think—aren't you going to dress—or something?

MOTHER. Dress! Why, I *am* dressed. Don't you see I've got on my new frock?

FATHER [*Discomfited*]. Oh, so you have. I—I didn't notice. [*He searches his mind for an excuse,*

and makes furtive motions toward the window]. How about dinner? Don't you think you ought to see if Bridget—[*He makes frantic motions behind* MOTHER's *back not to ring the bell*].

MOTHER. [*At the sewing table, calmly putting away her sewing things*]. Oh, no. Bridget is quite equal to dinner.

FATHER [*Desperate*]. *What are you doing?*

MOTHER. Just putting away my sewing things. I've been altering Sis's party dress. [*She holds it up.*]

FATHER [*Still pantomiming*]. Very pretty—very pretty.

MOTHER [*Pleased*]. Do you think so, dear? I'm so glad. I——

FATHER [*An inspiration*]. Why don't you go and get it laid out for her in her room, with—with fixings —and things?

MOTHER. Why, Father, how thoughtful you are! Yes, I will go and lay out her things.

FATHER [*Eagerly*]. Yes, do!

MOTHER [*Holding up the gown to admire it*]. It *is* pretty, isn't it?

FATHER [*At his wit's end*]. Yes—yes—let me help you— [*He pulls and finally pushes her toward* SIS's *door.*]

MOTHER. This color is always so becoming to her.

FATHER [*Distraught*]. Yes—yes——

MOTHER [*Sentimental*]. It was to me, too, when I was a girl. Don't you remember how, when I wore

blue, you'd always say, "Your eyes are blue—blue like the sky?"

FATHER. Yes—yes—but don't you think you ought to hurry?

MOTHER [*Annoyed*]. Hurry? Why, what's the matter with you, Father? You seem nervous.

FATHER. It's getting late.

MOTHER. Late? Well, you're the one to hurry then. You'll miss that train. Why don't you go?

FATHER [*Standing stock still*]. I'll go—I'll go——

MOTHER [*At* SIS'S *door*]. Well, *go* then. [*She exits into* SIS'S *room and closes the door.*]

[FATHER *showing great relief, tiptoes to the front door and opens it. A man, muffled to the ears, and carrying a big suitcase, comes into the entry and stands where he can be seen from the room.*]

FATHER. Sssh! Be careful! [*The man nods, puts down his suitcase, leans over, opens it and displays its contents to* FATHER, *who prances about a bit with excitement.*] It is all there?

BOOTLEGGER. Yes, six bundles. Two bottles to the bundle.

FATHER [*Ssh-ing him*]. Ssh! Quiet! Leave it in that suitcase, just as it is. I'll——

BOOTLEGGER. No. Can't. Have to use this suitcase again tonight. Look at that, sir! Best grade o' Scotch.

FATHER. Fine! Glad I was here when you came. My wife——

BOOTLEGGER. I understand, sir, they all says *that.*

FATHER. But where shall I put it?

BOOTLEGGER. Those suitcases, sir,—can't you use them? [*He hands the first bundle to* FATHER, *who brings it into the room, is at a loss where to put it, makes several false moves, and finally puts it on the floor about center. This is repeated with more and more "nerves" till all the bottles are on the floor. The* BOOTLEGGER *closes his suitcase and turns to go.*] There! That's all, sir. Merry Christmas, sir!

FATHER [*Fumbling in his pockets*]. Here! Have a cigar on me. [*Gives him a bill.*] Merry Christmas!

BOOTLEGGER [*Pocketing the bill*]. Thank you, sir! Good night. [*He exits.*]

[FATHER *comes down to the bundles and makes several false moves. He finally grabs* MOTHER's *case* [*inside one*] *and hauls it forward and opens it, kneeling at center facing front. The rolls of silver fall out.*]

FATHER [*Stuffing them back*]. The silver! Oh, hang! [*He slams the case shut, and puts it back in line with the others, but now* outside, *so that No. 3 is now where No. 2 was. He grabs Nos. 1 & 2 and opens them, hurriedly stuffing the bundles into the cases, three to the case. In replacing them in line he puts No. 1 in exactly the place under the table edge where* MOTHER's *case stood before. He barely finishes when* MOTHER's *hand is heard on* SIS's *doorknob and he scrambles to his feet and brushes off his knees just as* MOTHER *re-enters the room.*]

MOTHER. What! Haven't you gone yet? You'll never make it.

FATHER. I'm going—I'm going—but—I must hide these suitcases first. [*He picks them up— the two with liquor.*]

MOTHER [*Making him lay them down*]. I'll hide them. Run along now, for goodness' sake! Hurry! Hurry!

FATHER. I'm going. I'm going. But if the children should see these suitcases— [*He picks them up again.*]

MOTHER. I'll attend to them. Hurry! [*Snatches up his things from closet.*] Here! here's your scarf. [*Puts it on him carelessly.*] Here's your coat. [*Throws it around him and pushes him, he still holding suitcases.*] Put those *down.* [*He does so.*] You'll have to run for it. Here's your hat. [*Slams it on his head and pushes him to entry.*] Now, for heaven's sake—*go!* [*He exits. She turns back exhausted.*]

[BRIDGET *comes in from dining-room and* MOTHER *meets her.*]

BRIDGET. Will ye come and cast an eye over the table, mum? It looks beautiful.

MOTHER [*Going down to the suitcases*]. Yes, Bridget, just as soon as I've put away my silver. Your sneak-thief story scares me. [*She reaches under the table and takes No. 1 supposing it to be hers. Her face registers surprise.*] My, but this silver is heavy!

BRIDGET [*Trying to help*]. It is that, Mum. Where shall we put it? [*They stand at center holding the case up between them and surprised at its weight.*]

MOTHER. On the shelf under that table. [*Pointing right.*] [BRIDGET *carries it to the table and shoves in the suitcase.*]

BRIDGET. There! How's that? [MOTHER *nods.*] Now plaze, mum, do come an' see th' table. It looks grand!

MOTHER. I'm sure it does. Please take out that paper, Bridget. [BRIDGET *picks up wrapping paper and they exeunt talking together to the dining-room.*]

[*Clear stage for a moment, then the window is slowly opened, a hand and arm are seen, then a leg, finally a man appears, entering stealthily from the porch. He is muffled to the ears and has a cap pulled down over his eyes. He looks carefully about, closes the window, draws to the curtain and comes down to center. At sight of the suitcases he smiles and leans over to pick one up, when the honk of a taxi startles him. A whistle of the same character as* FATHER'S, *but given in a girl's voice, sounds at the door and the door-bell goes off with a bang. The man, cut off front and rear, and seeing the closet or screen, darts behind it just as* MOTHER *enters from the kitchen. Again the bell and whistle.* MOTHER *enters,* BRIDGET *following.*]

MOTHER [*Calling*]. Open the door, Bridget! [BRIDGET *enters and goes to open.* MOTHER *sees the suitcases and, lacking time to hide them, she snatches the shawl from the back of the divan and drops it on top of them. The bell rings again, impatiently.* BRIDGET *opens the door and is borne back into the room as* SIS *enters.*]

SIS. Hello, Bridget. [*Rushes past* BRIDGET *and into room.* BRIDGET *closes door and returns to kitchen.*] Darling Mums! [*She embraces her mother at center, the suitcases just at her right.*]

MOTHER. My darling child! [*They embrace again.*]

BOTH. Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! [*They laugh.*]

SIS. I said it first. [*She throws her suitcase down beside the others,* inside *position, becoming No. 4, and drops on top of the lot her fur coat, vanity case, bunch of flowers, box of candy, umbrella, magazines, etc. She is in a suit, preferably blue.*] Where's Dad? Why in the world didn't he meet me? I had such a heavy suitcase and it took me forever to get a Yellow. Oh, my goodness! I forgot! It's out there now, waiting, and I haven't money enough to pay!

MOTHER [*Protesting*]. Sis!

[BUD *and* JACK *enter through the front door.* BUD *rushes into the room while* JACK *stands in the doorway leading from the entry to the room, holding his hat in left hand and his suitcase in the right, as he watches the family greetings.* BUD's *on-rush carries* SIS *down left front.*]

BUD. Hello, Sis! [*They embrace bear-fashion.*]

SIS. Hello, Bud! Merry Christmas! I said it first! [*They talk together, laughing.*]

MOTHER [*Turning and discovering* JACK]. Won't you come in, please? [JACK *comes down and drops*

his suitcase beside the others, No. 5. She meets him at center, shaking his hand.] Do excuse Bud's lack of manners, Mr. Plummer. You *are* Mr. Plummer, aren't you? [JACK *nods, embarrassed.*] Welcome! I wish you a Merry Christmas!

JACK. Thank you, the same to you. [*He has eyes only for* SIS, *who becomes conscious of his gaze.*]

BUD. Excuse me, Jack. I was so glad to see the kid here I forgot to introduce you. Sis, this is the new friend I wrote you about,—Jack Plummer. He's going to take you to the dance tonight.

JACK [*Bowing*]. How-do-you-do!

SIS [*Very demure*]. I'm so happy to meet you, Mr. Plummer. It's too bad of Bud to force me down your throat this way. Maybe there's some one else you'd rather take to the dance. [*She smiles at him alluringly.*]

JACK [*Caught*]. Oh, no, no indeed! I assure you.

SIS. How lovely!

MOTHER. Bud, please close the door. You are freezing us to death.

BUD [*Going to do so and looking out*]. Hello! Who's Yellow taxi is this?

SIS. Oh, my gracious!—and the meter running higher every minute! It's mine—and I haven't a cent left. Somebody—give me some money—quick!

MOTHER [*Starting to the closet*]. My purse is right here in my coat pocket. [*She puts out her hand.*]

BUD. Never mind—I've got it—or— [*Looking at the money he has drawn from his pocket.*] Jack—what have you got?

[BUD *and* JACK *confer over change at center, and* BUD *exits front door to pay up.* SIS *turns to the fire to warm her hands, and* BRIDGET *puts her head through the dining-room door and beckons her mistress who is standing behind the divan protesting to* SIS *in pantomime over her carelessness.*]

BRIDGET. Plaze, mum, will ye come here a minute?

MOTHER. Please excuse me a moment.

JACK *and* SIS [*Bowing up stage to her simultaneously*]. Oh, certainly!

[MOTHER *exits to the dining-room, the closet door or curtain sways slightly open, the man's face appears and disappears with the swing-back of the door.*]

SIS. I'm getting deeply in your debt, Mr. Plummer. I'm sorry to be a nuisance. Are you sure there isn't somebody—somebody else you'd rather take tonight?

JACK [*Coming down to her*]. No, no! No indeed, I assure you! [*He gazes at her.*]

SIS [*Beaming on him*]. How lovely of you! Oh! Mr. Plummer——

JACK. Call me Jack—please!

SIS [*Coyly*]. Well—J-Jack, then— [*She looks down, he takes a step nearer to her, and they gaze into each other's eyes soulfully. Again the closet door or curtain swings open for an instant but closes swiftly.*]

JACK. May I have a lot of dances—every dance?

SIS [*Giggling*]. Oh, naughty, naughty! Big man, that would bore you.

JACK [*Fervently*]. Oh, no, no indeed, I assure you!

SIS. You do say such lovely things. [*They stand gazing into each other's eyes.*]

BUD [*Rushing in*]. There! He's paid. Come on now, Jack, we'll have to bathe and lick into our things double-quick. Mother's got a dinner up and old Bridget does know how to cook—oh, boy! [*Turning to* SIS.] You'd better hurry, too, Sis, your hair looks like a rat's nest.

SIS [*Turning on him with a swift change to anger*]. Oh, you horrid thing! [*To* JACK, *all softness.*] Does my hair look like a rat's nest?

JACK [*Far gone*]. Oh, no—no indeed! I assure you it looks wonderful.

SIS. Oh! you do say such lovely things!

BUD [*Disgusted*]. Aw! cut it out! Come on, Jack. [BUD *exits up the stair-way.*]

SIS [*Languishing*]. You must go, I suppose.

JACK [*Lost to the world*]. I—I—suppose— [*Slowly he breaks away and starts, turns back and repeats.*] I suppose— [*Comes to a dead halt.*]

SIS [*Starting to pick up her things, at which* JACK *rushes to help her. As he hands them to her, she murmurs*]. Oh! thank you—don't trouble—so good of you—I'm sure— [*As she stoops to reach for her suitcase, he prevents her, and takes it up without look-*

ing at it, being engaged in the pleasant occupation of gazing into her eyes; thus he takes his own case in place of hers.]

JACK. Let me—it's too heavy for your little hands.

SIS [*Starting towards her door*]. Heavy! Well, rather! I've got all my books in it. Flunked awfully and have to study all vacation. It's a crime!

JACK. How beastly! I was hoping I would see you a lot. [*By this time they are at her door.*]

SIS [*Demurely*]. Oh! were you?

JACK. Yes. I—I *must* see you, you know—I really *must.*

SIS [*Coyly*]. Oh, you're just pretending—bad man!

JACK. Oh, no—no indeed, I assure you.

BUD'S VOICE [*Calling from the top of the stair*]. Say, Jack! I say, Jack, hurry up here! You're late.

[JACK *drops the suitcase and holds out his hand to* SIS *with the air of saying farewell forever.*]

JACK. Good-by! I must go.

SIS [*Her hand in his*]. Good-by.

JACK. You'll give me the dances?

SIS. Well—maybe—some. [*Smiles.*]

JACK. Oh, thank you!

BUD'S VOICE [*Off, yelling*]. *Jack!*

JACK [*Calling back and starting to back off*]. Coming! [*To* SIS.] G-g-good-by, Sis—may I call you Sis?

SIS [*Softly*]. Yes. Good-by! [*He backs across*

the room to center, both holding a farewell gesture. When he reaches the suitcases, he falls backward over them, and, embarrassed, snatches the first case his hand falls on, which happens to be No, 3, and rushes up, stairs with it. Exits JACK.]

[SIS *picks up the suitcase at her feet (No. 5) and enters her room, closing the door. The door of the closet swings open a crack, and the man peers out. Seeing the coast clear, he enters the room, looks about and sees* SIS'S *suitcase (No. 4) and* MOTHER'S *(No. 3) standing side by side. He picks up No. 4, hefts it and smiles knowingly.* FATHER'S *step is heard outside and his whistle is given loudly as his key rattles in the door. The man, holding No. 4 still in his hand, darts again into the wardrobe and closes the door.* FATHER *opens the front door and enters, giving again the family whistle.* MOTHER *comes running from the dining-room.*]

MOTHER. Well!

FATHER. Well, I missed her. [*He throws his coat and hat on the end of the divan.*]

MOTHER. Missed her! I should say you did! She came long ago in a taxi-cab. Rather a dry welcome.

FATHER. Dry! Well, that's not my fault. [*He looks about for the suitcases.*]

MOTHER. Now, Father, don't leave your hat and overcoat there. Do hang them up. [*She puts out her hand to take them up, but is diverted by* FATHER'S *action in picking up suitcase No. 3.*]

FATHER. Oh, pretty soon. [*He hefts the suit-*

case and smiles, then looks for the other case.] Where's that other suitcase? I must put them away.

MOTHER [*Going to him*]. *I* put them away long ago. Now please, dear, put that right down, go fix the furnace, and then get cleaned up for dinner. The children are getting dressed and I don't want to hold dinner back for you.

FATHER [*Still holding and hefting the case*]. Yes, but I want to put them away——

MOTHER [*Gently but firmly*]. Now, dear, put that right down—the children will never notice, and it's nearly time for the presents, anyway. It would be silly to waste time putting those suitcases away. *Do* go and fix the furnace right now.

FATHER [*Reluctantly setting down the suitcase*]. Oh, hang the furnace! [*He starts toward the dining-room,* MOTHER *following with gentle protests.*]

MOTHER. Now, Father, you know you shouldn't set such an example to the children. What can you expect— [*They exeunt into the dining-room.*]

[*Clear stage. Again the closet door swings open and the man enters with the suitcase (No. 4) in his hand. He sees No. 3 by the table and picks it up and hefts it, looks a bit doubtful, but starts with it to the front door. A taxi horn is heard off, and the sound of feet running to the front door. The man rushes frantically down stage and looking about for a place to hide, pushes both suitcases behind the big chair. He finds there is not room for himself, too, and, as the bell gives a loud peal, he ducks into* MOTHER'S *room*

and closes the door. Meanwhile the doorbell rings vigorously and BRIDGET *hurries through and opens the front door. On her way she mutters.*]

BRIDGET. Yis—yis—hold yer tongue a minute, now! [*She opens.*]

VOICE OF TAXI-DRIVER [*Off.*] This belongs to the young lady fare I just had. She dropped it in the taxi.

BRIDGET [*Taking the article*]. Ach, thin, this can't be hers—'tis a cigarette case.

VOICE OF TAXI-DRIVER [*Laughing*]. It's hers, all right. Merry Christmas! [*Clatter of departing feet and roar of departing motor.*]

BRIDGET [*Coming down to* SIS's *door*]. Sssst! Miss Sissy—look here a minute!

SIS [*Opening and putting her head through the door*]. What is it, Bridget? [*She enters.*]

BRIDGET [*Holding out the case*]. The taxi-man's sure mistaken, Miss Sissy,—he said you was after droppin' this in the taxi. 'Tis a cigarette case.

SIS [*Grabbing it hastily and guiltily*]. Oh, my goodness! don't tell Mother. It—it belongs to—to one of the girls. You—won't tell?

BRIDGET [*Sagely and with meaning*]. No, I'll not tell your Mother *that*. She thinks you're just a little girl yet. [*Turns and makes a dignified exit to the dining-room.*]

[*Opening her case to see if her cigarettes are safe,* SIS *hears some one descending the stair. She puts the case behind her and steps forward to see who is com-*

ing. JACK *appears. At sight of her, he stands abashed.*]

SIS. What is it, Mr. Plummer? [*She comes up to right side of large table.*]

JACK [*Coming down opposite her on left side same and leaning across to her*]. You promised to call me Jack.

SIS [*Giggling*]. Well—then—Jack, what *are* you looking for?

JACK [*Uncomfortable*]. Why—I—well—is there a corkscrew anywhere about?

SIS [*Surprised*]. A corkscrew?

JACK. Yes. You see, I want to open—a—a bottle —of cough medicine.

SIS. Oh, poor boy! Has he got a nasty cough! I'm so sorry. [*She opens a drawer in the table and takes out a corkscrew.*] There's always a corkscrew here—Mother keeps a little of everything in this table drawer. There! [*As she hands it.*] I'm so sorry about the cough. Are you sure you have some good cough medicine?

JACK [*Embarrassed*]. Y-e-s, I'm pretty sure it's good.

SIS. I'm so sorry about the cough! [*She gazes up into his eyes across the table.*]

JACK [*Returning the gaze, their faces close together*]. Your eyes—do you know—they are blue—blue as the sky.

SIS. Oh, Mr. Plummer, you do say such lovely things.

MOTHER'S VOICE [*Off, calling*]. Oh, Sis! [*They remain gazing into each other's eyes while the call is repeated three times.*]

JACK [*Startled out of his mood*]. I—I must go, I suppose.

SIS. I suppose. [*He slowly exits to stair.*]

MOTHER'S VOICE [*Off*]. Oh, Sis. [*He beats a final exit.*]

SIS [*Coming out of it with a start*]. Yes, Mother.

MOTHER'S VOICE. I laid your gown and things on your bed.

SIS. Yes, Mother, thank you.

MOTHER'S VOICE. Hurry and dress, dear. Dinner is almost ready.

SIS [*Calling*]. I'll hurry, Mother. [*She exits into her room.*]

[*Now the man steals out of* MOTHER'S *room, and starts to take the suitcases out from behind the chair, but the voices of* FATHER *and* MOTHER, *heard in altercation just inside the dining-room, frighten him, and he darts back into* MOTHER'S *room, leaving the cases still behind the chair. Enter* FATHER *and* MOTHER, *disputing.*]

MOTHER. No. Certainly not!

FATHER. But, my dear, just for Christmas. I could shake up a whisky-sour in five minutes.

MOTHER. But there's nothing in the house to shake it with. Even the little brandy I had is in the pudding sauce.

FATHER. But if I should find some?

MOTHER [*Practical*]. Where?

FATHER [*Vague*]. Oh—anywhere—down in the store-room—or—anywhere?

MOTHER [*Scornful*]. The store-room! Nonsense! There's not even a drop of cider there.

FATHER [*Groaning*]. Not even a yeast-cake and a raisin?

MOTHER. Besides, there are the young people to think of. You must set them an example.

FATHER [*Crossing meditatively to fire*]. So it seems. Humm! But—suppose—just *suppose* I *did* find—something? Somewhere? Eh? Come, Mother, you know you'd like a wee nippy yourself, eh? Where's the shaker?

MOTHER. Certainly not!—And you won't find any. —And the shaker's on the second shelf in the pantry.

FATHER [*Pleased*]. And the lemons?

MOTHER [*Going toward* SIS'S *room*]. I think it's prefectly terrible before the children. [*At center front she turns.*] The lemons are in the cold-closet.

FATHER [*Jubilant*]. And the sugar?

MOTHER [*Reaching the door and turning*]. You shouldn't do it, you know.—[*Opens the door.*] Bridget will give you the sugar. [*Exits into* SIS'S *room.*]

[FATHER *gives a little prance around, whistles gaily and exits toward the kitchen. Again the Man starts to come out of* MOTHER'S *room, but is driven back by the noise of* JACK *descending the stair.* JACK

enters carrying the suitcase in one hand and an opened bottle in the other. He sets the suitcase down close to the end of the divan and the bottle upon the sewing-table, behind the sewing basket. He has taken off his coat and vest and tie, and his collar is open. His hair is rumpled and his eye a trifle vague. Still, he is far *from being intoxicated. He looks round, puzzled at the lack of suitcases, goes to the spot where he put his down and stares inquiringly at the carpet.*]

JACK. Damned funny! Black suitcase was black— [*Looks vaguely about.*] How'll I dress for dinner?

[*He hears voices in* SIS'S *room,—loud, excited voices, and has just time to duck into the closet when* SIS *and* MOTHER *enter from* SIS'S *room,* SIS *crying at the top of her voice, and carrying articles of men's wearing apparel, which she drops, piece by piece, on the floor in her progress; a shirt, socks, ties, etc. She finally throws herself onto the divan and weeps aloud.* MOTHER, *who remains by the table, seems almost as upset as* SIS. *Hearing the noise,* FATHER *and* BRIDGET *rush in from the kitchen, and* BUD *from the stairway.* FATHER *holds a cocktail shaker in his hands, and sets it down on the table as the scene progresses.*]

SIS. Oh! Oh, dear—oh, dear—oh, dear—oh-oh-oh-oooooooo!

FATHER, BRIDGET *and* BUD. What is it? What is it? What's the matter?

SIS. Oh-oh-oh-o-ooooo! I've been roooBBBBB—roooooB-rob-robbed! Oh-oh-ooo!

FATHER. Robbed? [*Turns to* MOTHER.] Robbed? What does she mean?

MOTHER. It's her suitcase—her black suitcase—it's gone.

FATHER [*Horrified*]. Gone! The black suitcase *gone!* Ye gods! [*He rushes frantically around the room, looking and discovering nothing.*]

BUD [*Picking up a sock and tie from the floor*]. What's this?

SIS [*Howling*]. It's a man's—a m-a-n's! Oh-oh-oooo!

FATHER, BRIDGET *and* BUD. A man's?

MOTHER. It *does* seem to be.

BUD. She's exchanged with some fellow on the train, little idiot!

SIS [*Howling*]. It's all Father's fault for not meeting me, so there! Oh-oh-oh-oooo! My suitcase! My suitcase! [MOTHER *crosses to* SIS *and sits by her trying to comfort her.*]

FATHER [*Relieved*]. Oh, if *that's* all—! What is there to make such a fuss about? There's no great harm done, I guess. You've got some man's suitcase and he's got yours.

SIS [*Bursting into louder wails*]. Oh-oh-oh-oooo! That's what's so awful. Oh-oh-ohooooooooo!

BUD [*Suspicious*]. *What's* so awful, Sis? What was in your suitcase?

SIS [*Wailing*]. Ohooooooooo! my letters. Oh-oooooo!

ALL [*Amazed*]. *Letters?* WHAT letters? WHOSE letters?

SIS. Ohooooo—Reggie's—oooooooooooo ooooo!

FATHER. Who in hell is Reggie?

BUD. Yes, who in hell is Reggie?

FATHER. Now then, young lady, stop your noise and tell us about these letters. What kind of letters were they?

SIS. They—they—were l-l-love letters. Ohooooooooo!

[FATHER *and* BUD *mutter imprecations, and, plunging their hands in their pockets, pace the floor.*]

MOTHER [*To* BRIDGET]. Bridget, you'd better go back to your dinner. [BRIDGET *exits reluctantly.*] [*To* SIS]. There, there, child, I dare say these are not the first love letters that have been lost. Don't cry so. Tell me, were they very—very——?

SIS [*Nodding vehemently*]. Ohooooooo—yes—oooooooo——

[*The family exchange glances and* FATHER *and* BUD *pace harder than ever.*]

MOTHER. Come now, dear, just what disturbs you so about losing these letters?

SIS. Ohoooo! If any one should see them—he—he called me——

MOTHER [*Encouraging*]. Yes, what *did* he call you?

SIS [*In a fresh burst*]. Ohooooooooo! he called me —honey-baby. Ohoooo!

BUD. Sickening!

SIS [*Getting her spunk up*]. Oh! *you* needn't say anything—*you!* Why, I've heard you call that red-headed Mary Simpkins, "ducky-darling"—so *there!*

BUD. Aw— [*He turns and flees up the stair.*]

MOTHER [*To whom the situation is becoming humorous*]. Now, dear, don't cry any more. Your eyes will be all red for the party. Father will report the loss of the suitcase to the Railroad Company in the morning, and probably we'll get your suitcase back unopened. Anyway, cheer up now and don't spoil Christmas dinner. Just look at your eyes—red when they should be blue. [SIS *still weeps, but quietly.*] What will Mr. Plummer say?

[BUD *is heard descending the stair at a mad rush, He bursts into the room.* MOTHER *and* SIS *rise.*]

BUD. I say—something's awfully queer about all this—Jack has disappeared.

ALL. Disappeared! [*The closet door swings open a crack, unperceived, and immediately closes again.*]

BUD. Yes. He was there just a few minutes ago, I know. I heard him pulling a cork.

FATHER [*Electrified*]. Pulling a cork!

BUD. Yes. And now he's gone—disappeared. I've looked all over upstairs and he's nowhere to be be seen.

FATHER. Was there any—any bottle open?

BUD. Bottle?

FATHER. Well, you said "cork"—"pulling a cork." Where there's a cork, there's usually a bottle.

MOTHER. Oh, why bother about corks and bottles. There's something wrong here. Where could he be?

FATHER. Are his things there?

BUD [*Suddenly remembering*]. His things? Why —no—only his coat and vest—not even his suitcase—that's gone.

FATHER [*Intent*]. Suitcase gone? What color was it?

BUD. Black.

FATHER [*To* MOTHER]. A *black* suitcase gone—Hummmm!

MOTHER. But he hasn't come through here, and there's only the one stairway.

SIS [*Beginning again*]. Ohooooooo! [*Etc.*]

MOTHER [*With determination*]. We must all go and search the house. [*She starts for the stair and* FATHER *and* BUD *go out with her.* SIS, *who has been drying her eyes, discovers she is alone.*]

SIS. Oh! wait for me! [*She rushes after them.*]

[*Clear Stage. Now the closet door and the door to* MOTHER'S *room begin to swing slowly open. The man appears at* MOTHER'S *door, and noticing the closet door, ducks back into the room. Jack enters. He comes dazedly down front, and, seeing his clothes strewn on the floor, begins to pick them up. This leads inevitably to* SIS'S *room, the door of which has been left open. He hesitates and finally enters on tip-toe, swinging the door nearly to behind him. The man now enters from* MOTHER'S *room. He snatches the two suitcases out from behind the big chair and*

jerks SIS'S *open. Out fall school-books, lingerie, cosmetics, toilet articles, etc. Also a big bundle of letters, in a bold hand, tied with baby-blue ribbon. He glances at these, whispers "honey-baby," laughs and throws them down. The ribbon slips and the letters strew the floor at front left. He opens the other case and out fall the rolls of silver. He mutters angrily, "silver!" and casts them aside. He now turns up stage and sees the case which* JACK *brought down and placed beside the sewing-table. He grabs and opens it. He shows satisfaction, closes it and looks about for No. 1, which he discovers under the table, right, and brings down, after satisfactory examination; picks up No. 2 and starts to leave with the booty. The noise of the family descending the stair frightens him into hiding, suitcases and all, in the closet. He closes the door just as the family dash downstairs and into the room, all talking excitedly.*]

ALL. He isn't there—the coat and vest—didn't you notice—the black suitcase—what in thunder—[*etc.*]

SIS [*Seeing her letters*]. My letters! Oh, thank goodness! [*She rushes down front and begins to gather them up.*]

MOTHER [*Seeing her silver*]. My silver! Oh, thank goodness! [*She makes same play.*]

BUD [*Looking at floor*]. But—the man's clothes—they're—they're gone!

FATHER. Mother, where did you hide that suitcase?

MOTHER. Under that table.

FATHER [*Rushing there*]. The black suitcase—gone! Robbers!

[*They all look at one another, then tiptoe together at center front and whisper.*]

ALL. Robbers! Here! Sssst! [*A slight noise in* SIS'S *room makes them all jump and* SIS *gives a scream, clapping her hands over her mouth.*]

FATHER [*Whispering*]. Where's my revolver?

MOTHER [*Distracted*]. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I don't know—Oh, dear! Oh, dear! [*More noise in room.*]

FATHER. My revolver—quick—I must have it! Where is it?

MOTHER [*Frantically*]. I—I think it's in the pantry. [FATHER *starts to the kitchen,* MOTHER *follows.*]

BUD. I'm going to get a mashie. [BUD *starts upstairs.*]

SIS [*Alone front, and gazing spellbound at her door*]. Oh!—wait—wait—for me! [*She rushes after* BUD.]

[*Clear Stage. Now the doors both swing open again, and as the man sees* SIS'S *door opening, he withdraws. Jack enters from* SIS'S *room, disheveled, with his suitcase under his arm, the rumpled clothing protruding from its edges. He gets as far as the table, when he hears the family returning and, dropping on his knees, crawls under the table, where he is in view*

of the audience. FATHER *enters, furious, without his revolver,* MOTHER *has the broom and* BRIDGET *the rolling pin.*]

FATHER. My revolver! Where in thunder is my revolver?

MOTHER [*Dashing to the hall and bringing a dandyish stick of* BUD'S]. Here, dear, take—take this—club. [*He takes it.*]

BUD [*Rushing in from the stair with mashie*]. Where is he? Have you found him?

SIS [*With feather-duster, following* BUD]. Wait for me— Wait for me! [*They all huddle at center and point at* Sis's *door.*]

FATHER [*Whispering*]. Ssst! We must have a plan. [*They all nod.*] I'll go round to Sis's porch window and make a rear attack. Bud, you guard the front door.

BUD [*Swinging his mashie*]. I will.

FATHER. Bridget, you look out for the kitchen door. [BRIDGET *nods.*] Sis and Mother take the stair. [*They nod.*] Ready? [*All nod.*] Go! If you see any one, yell.

SIS [*Teeth chattering*]. I will, I will.

BUD. I bet you will. [*She makes a pass at him as he exits.*]

[*All tiptoe to places, but as soon as the men are off, at a slight noise made by* JACK, *the women all rush together at center.*]

THE WOMEN. Hark! sssst! Did you hear it? Sssst! [*They see the cloth of the table moving as*

JACK *pulls it accidentally. They point and huddle and all gaze goggle-eyed till he pulls it so far all the packages fall with a bang, whereat they all start screaming and belaboring the table.* JACK *crawls out crestfallen and they fall back in amazement.*]

SIS. *You!*

MOTHER. *Mr. Plummer!*

JACK. Y-e-s—I—lost my suitcase.

ALL. Suitcase?

JACK. Y-e-s. A *black* suitcase. [SIS *sees the door or curtain of the closet move and stifles a scream.*]

ALL. What's the matter? What's the matter?

SIS [*Pointing*]. Look! There! There's some one in there.

JACK [*Starting to closet*]. I'll see.

SIS [*Grabbing him by the coat-tail*]. Look out! He might kill you. [*The man decides on a quick get-a-way, and dashes out, carrying both suitcases. The women start to scream.* FATHER *and* BUD *re-enter quickly.* JACK *makes a quick tackle on the man as he reaches position behind divan, and* BUD *joins him. There is an awful crash of glass. The women scream, the men struggle, as they get the man to his feet and haul him forward to rear center. The women are huddled, right.*]

JACK [*Holding* TERRENCE'S *left arm*]. Here, now, none of that!

BUD. Cut it out! We've got you, all right! [*Holds him, right.*]

TERRENCE [*Panting*]. Got *me*, have you! Ha!

Got *me!* Let go of me, you young idiots, or 'twill be the worse for yez—resistin' an officer. [*He struggles.*]

JACK AND BUD. An officer! Ha! Think you can put *that* over? [*Struggles.*]

BRIDGET [*Getting a view of* TERRENCE]. Holy Saints! [*Screams.*] 'Tis me cousin Terrence the policeman! [*She rushes over and throws her arms about his neck, thus completely disabling him.*]

ALL. Policeman! [*They fall back dismayed.*]

TERRENCE [*Throwing back his lapel and showing his star*]. Special dooty. Plain clothes.

ALL [*Except* BRIDGET]. A policeman! [FATHER *groans and sinks upon the sofa;* MOTHER *flies to his side.* SIS *and* JACK *retreat right;* BUD, BRIDGET *and* TERRENCE *are at center.*]

TERRENCE [*Coolly*]. Yis, my friends, prohibition enforcement officer—on special dooty. [*He looks at* FATHER, *who groans.*] I see, sorr, you're afther havin' a bit of a spill. [*He draws out his pad and pencil.*] I'll have to be reportin' of yez.

BRIDGET [*Who has been investigating the wreck*]. All broke! Ivery one of 'em! [*Holds up a broken bottle.*] Don't it smell wonderful?

TERRENCE [*Sadly*]. How many bottles, sorr?

FATHER [*Mournfully*]. Twelve—at eight dollars the bottle.

TERRENCE [*More mournfully*]. Twilve bottle o' good Scotch gone bluey! [*He writes on his pad.*] Well, sorr, what name, sorr?

SIS [*Crossing over to him*]. But Mr. Policeman, what were *you* going to do with that Scotch?

JACK [*Joining her*]. Yes, Officer, why all this hiding, I say?

TERRENCE. Well, I may as well be havin' it as the next one. They're all doin' it.

BUD [*Hand significantly in pocket*]. I say, Officer, now that it's all smashed——

BRIDGET [*Beginning to understand*]. Hiven help us. You'd niver be takin' up the Master, Terrence?

MOTHER [*Spying the bottle on the table*]. Here seems to be a bottle,—opened. [*She points.*]

JACK [*Embarrassed*]. I—I opened it.

SIS [*Understanding*]. Your cough medicine?

FATHER [*Picking it up*]. No wonder the cork popped. Here, Officer, 'tis only one instead of the twelve you expected to get, but you're welcome to it. [*Offers it to* TERRENCE.]

TERRENCE [*Taking it gladly*]. 'Tis wonderful stuff, sorr.

MOTHER. Bridget will get you a lemon. [SIS *hands him the shaker.*]

BRIDGET. Come, Terrence, dinner's ready. There's brandy in the puddin' sauce——

TERRENCE [*At the door*]. Brandy in the puddin' sauce! Hooray! [*He flourishes the bottle and he and* BRIDGET *exeunt.*]

THE THREE YOUNG PEOPLE. Brandy in the puddin' sauce! Hooray! [*They wave in imitation of* TERRENCE, JACK *and* BUD *take* SIS *between them, and*

arm in arm exeunt to dining-room. They cheer off stage till fall of curtain.]

MOTHER. I suppose it's my fault, Father.

FATHER [*Putting his arm round her*]. No, dear, Volstead's.

QUICK CURTAIN.

SKIM-MILK

An Episode

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CHARACTERS

John Stanley, aged 60, Professor of Latin and Greek in a State University. A gentle soul, living in past ages. Thin, stooped, bald, dyspeptic. Wears round-lensed, thick glasses with tortoise-shell frames. Very clean but shabby clothes.

Rose Stanley, aged 38, his wife. Slim, active, darkly beautiful. A tensely vibrant soul, held steady by a strong will. Dressed in simple house-dress.

Jean Stanley, aged 20, their daughter. Boyish figure, intellectual face. She has her father's brilliant mind and her mother's strong nature. Dressed in uniform of American Red Cross nurse.

Ted Stanley, aged 18, their son. Big, vital, athletic. Dark like his mother and having her emotional temperament. Dressed in uniform of American soldier, infantry.

Captain Jack Levering, aged 40, Captain U. S. National Army. Ruddy-faced, clean-shaven,—an out-of-door man. Very magnetic personality. Dressed in uniform of his rank.

SKIM-MILK

TIME: 1917.

SCENE: *The living-room of a comfortable bungalow in California during the World War, in a town where the University Campus has been made a national training ground. The room shows taste but restricted means. In the center of the rear wall is an outside door giving on a porch, which, in turn, gives on the parade ground of the Campus. Windows flank the door on either side and seats are under the windows. In the window to the left hangs a service-flag with one star.*

In the left-hand wall, up stage, comes first; the door to the kitchen, then open book-shelves running down to extreme front. Well forward, left, and clear of the shelves, stands a large table which serves both as dining-table and library table. Just now it holds a reading-lamp, a telephone and many books and magazines. Set up near this, about center, is an adjustable ironing-board with an electric iron on it. A Red Cross Uniform, almost ironed, is also on the board.

On the right-hand side comes: first, the door to JEAN'S *room, then the fireplace with a settle built out at right angles to its up-stage end. Just behind this settle is a costumer on which wraps are hung. Before the settle is a small folding table piled high with Mss. On the*

mantel-shelf are: a bowl of California poppies, a small strong-box, a framed photo of TED *and another photograph in a folding case. There is a fire in the fireplace. Below the fireplace is the door to* JOHN'S *private study.*

The rise of the curtain discovers JOHN STANLEY *seated on the settle going over the Mss. on the table before him.* ROSE *enters from the kitchen, bearing a tray set out with his luncheon. He sweeps the Mss. away and she places the tray before him. His manner is distrait and a bit petulant. Hers is that of a tender mother to a sick child.*

ROSE. There, John dear, eat your luncheon. You've twenty minutes before your next class. Don't hurry, or you'll have indigestion all afternoon. [*She arranges the tray with deft touches.*]

JOHN [*Shoving his papers into his bag with distaste*]. Such a lot of dunderheads! Not a decent translation among them. All the clever fellows dropped out of Latin and Greek when the training-camp opened.

ROSE. They hadn't time for both.

JOHN. I know. Culture's but a stable-boy when War is in the saddle. They like this better, anyway, the young savages! Latin verbs were a penance, rifle-practice is a lark.

ROSE. But it *is* important. Ted says he is getting good marks in it.

JOHN. Well, if Ted goes, I'd rather he'd shoot straight than parse straight. I'm proud of our son, Rose—he's like you,

Rose. And Jean is like *you*, dear. Now eat. Your luncheon will be cold.

John [*Uncovering his dishes and smiling*]. What have you given me? *White* bread—toasted—and bacon? Oh, Rosie, what would Hoover say!

Rose. He'd say, eat it, obey orders, mind your wife. You know you'll be ill if you eat the coarse bread,—the rest of us will do that. As for the bacon, it's a brand of end pieces they can't send over-seas. Drink your cocoa. It's not too rich. I made it with skim-milk.

John [*Doing as directed*]. Reduced to a diet of skim-milk! Re-articulating the bones of dead languages while younger and better men, like Jack Levering, are going to fight. Pah!

Rose. Don't fret! Ted will fight in your place. There are rumors that they leave very soon. Captain Levering tells them that——

John [*Testily*]. Captain Levering! Until a month ago you and the children were calling him "Uncle Jack." Why "Captain" him so carefully these days!

Rose [*Trying to be casual*]. Oh! just hearing Ted. It's part of the training.

John. You and I aren't in training. I hate these changes. I miss him at chess. He hasn't been here for a month,—not since that day your sleeve caught fire and he put it out. Lucky he was here or you'd have been badly burned. You owe him a lot, Rose.

Rose [*Who has been showing strain*]. I know—I know, John.

JOHN. How did it happen?—you never did tell me.

ROSE [*Tortured*]. Please! please! don't speak of it! I—I want to forget it.

JOHN. Forgive me! I did not realize you were so nervous about it. It's not like you, Rose. [*He catches her hand and caresses it.*] Thank Heaven these lovely hands were not burned! [*She tries to escape.*] My lovely Rose!

ROSE. I must iron Jean's uniform, John. [*She breaks away and goes to the ironing board.*] I wish Jean would come for her luncheon. She's working too hard at the hospital, I'm afraid,—she's getting thin—but how she loves the work!

JOHN [*Annoyed*]. Why couldn't she be satisfied to stay at home and help you! She's been in training nearly three years now. I hardly see her any more—my little Jeanie. I can't think of her as a trained nurse.

ROSE. Dr. Dagley tells me she's a fine one, especially in surgical work.

JOHN [*Stubbornly*]. I think she ought to stay at home. There she comes now,—I hear her step. Why, what's the matter? She's running.

JEAN [*Entering at a breathless run, rushes to her* MOTHER *and throws her arms about her*]. Oh! Mother-Mother—Mother! It's happened. I'm going. I'm really going! [*She gives her* MOTHER *a hug.*] Hug me, Mother, I'm going with the Dagley Unit—tonight. Oh, Mother!

ROSE [*Embracing her*]. My child! My darling child!

JOHN [*Rising*]. Going? Going where?

JEAN. To France.

JOHN [*Coming down*]. Nonsense! Impossible! A young girl like you! It's not safe.

JEAN [*Hotly*]. Safe! Who wants to be safe—these days? Suppose Uncle Jack talked about "playing safe"?

JOHN. Let the old ones go.

JEAN. Old? Old people can't stand up to it. They don't want us old.

JOHN [*Bitterly*]. No. Age has no gifts for war —only for civilization.

JEAN. And civilization is out of fashion. Are my things clean and ironed, Mummy? I must have my bags ready by nine o'clock.

ROSE [*Keeping cool with an effort*]. Just this coif to iron, Jean, and everything will be done. I'll hurry. [*She starts to iron.*]

JOHN. Rose, you are never going to let her do such a crazy thing? You must be mad! She shall not go, I tell you—she shall not go!

JEAN [*Facing him calmly*]. Father dear, I'm going. No one, not even Mummy, could stop me. What have I been training for all these months? You might as well tell Ted *he* can't go when *his* orders come.

JOHN. That's different. Ted's a man and it is his duty to fight when his country needs him. He must

take care of himself. But *you*—a young girl—over there— [*He is trembling near collapse.*]

Rose [*Going to him*]. There, there, calm yourself, John. You'll be ill if you get so excited.

John [*Groping petulantly*]. Where's my bag? Why don't you give me my bag? I'm late to class now.

Rose [*Giving him his bag and finding his hat for him as for a child*]. Here, dear, I wish you didn't have to go. Come back after class and I'll give you a glass of hot milk. [*She shepherds him through the door and looks after him with soft pity.*]

Jean [*Going to the mantel and taking down the photo in a folder*]. I'll pack my bag, Mummy, and come back for these things. [*Indicating the freshly ironed clothes.*]

Rose [*Turning toward her from the open door*]. It will almost kill him, Jean. Do you *have* to go? Couldn't you take the place of a more experienced nurse here at the hospital and let her go?

Jean. Mother! Don't *you* be a quitter! I'm the best surgical nurse at the hospital,—Dr. Dagley says so; and it's surgical nurses they need over there.

Rose [*Moaningly*]. I—I suppose so.

Jean. A girl can't hold back just because she's a *girl*. That was all right in your day, Mummy, but now we're even with the boys: we vote with them, take degrees away from them at college, get their jobs down town; so now, when war comes, we can't shirk our share.

ROSE. I don't ask you to shirk, Jean, but——

JEAN [*Putting her arm around her* MOTHER]. And just think, it might be Ted—or—or Jimmy [*she opens the case in her hand and shows the photo to her* MOTHER] who needed me.

ROSE. You're so young.

JEAN. I'm almost twenty-one and Ted's only eighteen.

TED [*Who has appeared at the open door in time to hear this.*] Don't brag, Sis. I may be only eighteen but I'm a second Lieutenant, just the same. [*An instant's pause while this sinks in, then* JEAN *rushes up to him and drags him down center front, where* ROSE *joins them.*]

JEAN [*With a little shriek*]. Ted! Ted! You don't mean it! Baby Brother a real officer? Shake, old man! [*They solemnly shake.*]

ROSE [*In a flutter*]. Teddy, oh, Teddy boy! When did you hear?

TED. My commission just arrived. Captain Levering gave me leave to come and tell you.

JEAN. Hooray! Think of him in uniform! [*She salutes him jokingly.*] What did Jimmy get?

TED. Oh! A First for *him.* [JEAN *gives a little shriek of joy and dances a fling.*] He's made good with Captain Levering. *He* says Jimmy's all right. *I'll* say he is.

JEAN [*Gravely*]. I'll say he is.

TED. Too bad, Sis, you can't go to France now.

JEAN. Why not?

TED. New ruling on relatives of over-seas men, and as we're going over soon——

JEAN. How soon?

TED. Don't know—but *soon.* Too bad, Sis!

JEAN. Hump! Smarty, keep your tears. I'll beat you to it.

TED. How's that?

JEAN. Going to-night—Dagley Unit.

TED. Tonight! Bully for you! [*He shakes hands with his sister quite gravely.*] I say, Mummy, anything in the ice-box? I'm half starved.

ROSE [*Who has been rapidly ironing but listening closely*]. Of course, dear. Honey-cookies in the cooky-jar. I'll come and show you. [*She has laid the folded, freshly ironed things on the table, folded up the ironing-board and set it beside the kitchen door. She now picks up the tray and starts for the kitchen.*] Bring the ironing-board, dear. I've some goodies saved up for you. [*They exeunt to kitchen on* TED'S *next line.*]

TED. Cookies! Whoopie! [*Exeunt.*]

[JEAN *goes about the task of gathering up her things. The telephone rings and she takes off the receiver.*]

JEAN. Hello!—yes—yes— Mrs. Stanley is busy; may I take the message, please?—Yes— I'll tell her, Mrs. Green, but I wish you wouldn't ask it of her, she is overdoing all the time.—Even if her bandages *are* the best, she mustn't kill herself.—Very well, I'll tell her.—Good-by! [*She hangs up.*]

ROSE [*Entering from the kitchen*]. Was that the telephone?

JEAN. Yes. Mrs. Green wants you at the Red Cross Rooms tomorrow at nine. They have a big quota of bandages to roll. Don't you go, Mother.

ROSE [*Trying to be gay*]. Ted has to go and you have to go and I have to go—sounds like going to Jerusalem, doesn't it?

JEAN. If only you had some one to do the heavy work——

ROSE [*Still gaily*]. Nobody but a lady will condescend these days to do *heavy* work. Besides, the salary of a Latin professor doesn't go far.

JEAN [*Bitterly*]. No. Father should have been a plumber.

ROSE [*Laughing*]. He says, a prize-fighter.

JEAN. Dear old Dad! I hope he won't take it too hard. You're wonderful, Mother, to understand so well.

ROSE [*Looking at the photograph*]. I understand, dear, that if Jimmy is over there *you must* be. That's it, isn't it?

JEAN [*Nodding*]. If I come back and he comes back—why, then, I'll marry him—some day.

ROSE [*Looking her in the eyes*]. Even if he comes back—shattered?

JEAN. Then more than ever.—I could earn a living for both of us.

ROSE. My darling child! And I wanted you to have the cream of life!

JEAN [*Exultantly*]. I mean to have it. No skim-milk for me.

[*A knock at the open door makes the women turn quickly.*]

CAPTAIN LEVERING [*Doffing his cap*]. May I come in?

JEAN [*With a cry of joy, runs to him*]. Uncle Jack! Uncle Jack! Come in—do! [*She draws him into the room excitedly.*] You've stayed away years!

LEVERING [*Looking at* ROSE, *who turns away*]. Only a month, Jean. Did you miss me?

JEAN. Horribly! Nobody's played chess with Daddy and nobody's bullied me. Why, you've not been here since—not—since Mummy tried to burn up and you saved her.

ROSE [*Quickly*]. Don't talk of horrors, dear. Tell Captain Levering your news.

JEAN. Guess, Uncle Jack, guess! Something wonderful!

LEVERING [*Teasing*]. A new doll?

JEAN. Silly! Got my orders for France. Start tonight. Dagley Unit— I'll beat *you* over. Isn't it just wonderful!

LEVERING. Jean! Not *you!* [*He looks at* ROSE.] Are you—letting her go?

ROSE [*Proudly*]. Why not? They want the best, don't they?

LEVERING. But little Jean— [*He looks at her tenderly.*]

JEAN. Oh! you're as bad as Father. You men are all alike,—want to take all the glory. I'm going to get my share. Bye-bye, Mummy! Must run to the hospital and get my stuff there to pack. Bye, Uncle Jack! Meet you over there. So long! [*She throws on her wraps and flies out, banging the door to behind her.* ROSE *and* LEVERING *stand regarding each other.*]

LEVERING. Rose! my poor darling!

ROSE. You promised not to come again,—after that day.

LEVERING. Perhaps you'll forgive me when you know my message. [TED *is heard whistling in the kitchen.*] Ha! Is Ted out there?

ROSE. Yes. He's having a snack.

LEVERING. May it be a good one! It's his last, Rose.

ROSE [*Starting violently*]. You mean——?

LEVERING [*Raising a warning hand*]. Sssh! You must keep it secret till the order's out. That's why I came. It's the last time—for both of us. [ROSE *sways a little as from a blow.* TED's *whistling is at the door and* TED, *himself, enters, eating a large cooky. At sight of his superior officer he makes a comical effort to carry out the salute still salvaging the cooky.*] All right, Ted, at your ease. [*To* ROSE.] Has he told you he is a second lieutenant?

ROSE. Thank you for all your kindness!

LEVERING. No thanks to me,—he earned it. Congratulations, boy!

TED. Thank you, sir.

LEVERING. May I go into John's study? I want to find a book I need.

ROSE. Certainly. Make yourself at home there. [LEVERING *exits into* JOHN'S *study.* ROSE, *slipping her arm in* TED'S *and bringing him down to the settle.*] Find enough to eat, son?

TED [*Finishing the cooky*]. Yummy! You bet! Gee! Wish you'd teach our cook how to make bread! When I get to be General Pershing——

ROSE [*Laughing*]. You'll make me Quartermaster General? Done! I accept the office, Your Majesty, and report for orders!

TED [*Giving her a bear-hug*]. Report to Lieutenant Stanley for a kiss. [*He smacks her.*]

ROSE [*Dangling in air*]. General Pershing, sir, put me down, sir!

TED [*Setting her on her feet*]. Here, you! Don't you go giving orders to a superior officer.

ROSE [*Drawing him to a seat on the bench beside her*]. No man is superior to his stomach, sir. Tell me, Ted, how does it feel to be an officer?

TED. It's mixed, Mums. I'm proud to make good, especially for you and Dad, but it was loads of fun just being a dough-boy. No responsibility. No use for the old bean [*Tapping his head*]—tell you when to breathe. Easy life, I'll say. Now an officer—it gives me a queer feeling. I'll be responsible—even for their lives.

ROSE. You're—you're not afraid, Ted?

TED. Only of being afraid. I say, Mums, it's going to be rotten for you to have Jean go over. Seems to me you get the worst of everything. Everybody else gets the cream.

ROSE [*Smiling*]. And I have the skim-milk? Perhaps it's good for me.

TED. I'd loathe it. You're the best mother in all the world and I want you to know that whatever happens, I'll try to live up to you and what you've taught me.

ROSE [*Under strong emotion*]. Thank you, dear! You make me very proud. [*She changes mood by sheer force of will.*] Now, let's talk about your uniform.

TED. Gee! Mums, I'm afraid it will cost a lot.

ROSE [*Gaily*]. Of course it will. I know all about it. I've been preparing for it for months.

TED. Preparing?

ROSE [*Going to strong-box and taking it down*]. Yes. I knew from the beginning you'd make good and so I began saving for the uniform. [*Opens box.*] See! I've more than enough. [*She takes out a large roll of bills and gives it to him.*]

TED [*Taking it*]. Gee! Mother, you're wonderful. [*He kisses her.*] The Captain says he has it all ordered for me, measured and all. I'll hit you in the eye, believe me. [*A bugle call comes across the parade-ground.*] There! I must run. Bye, Mums! [*He starts.*]

ROSE [*In a sudden panic*]. Ted! Ted, darling! Give me a kiss! Good-by! Ted! My Ted!

TED [*Kissing her hastily and running*]. Bye, Mums! [*He bolts from the house and off. She runs to the door and watches him off, supporting herself against the door and shaken with emotion.* CAPTAIN LEVERING, *hearing* TED'S *departure, enters from the study.*]

LEVERING. Rose! Rose!

ROSE [*Making a supreme effort*]. I won't. [*She falters down-stage.*] All my heart is going—over there.

LEVERING. Rose! I——

ROSE. You too.

LEVERING [*Starting toward her*]. Rose! My darling!

ROSE [*Holding him off*]. Oh! what does anything matter now? A month ago when my sleeve caught fire and you put it out, I suddenly found out how much—how very much you meant to me. I've tried to put out *that* fire—and forget——

LEVERING. Ah, Rose! I have stayed away as you commanded, but every morning my heart awoke me, singing: "She loves you—the sweetest Rose of all loves you!" Don't take that away from me.

ROSE. Take away from you! Oh, Jack! If you knew how I long to give—give! I'm in a labyrinth—I've lost my way. Before you came, I thought I was happy. I was both child and mother to dear old John, and I had the children—such lovely children, Jack!

LEVERING. Would they were ours, my darling!

ROSE. And then *you* come, playing games with them

and chess with John,—and suddenly, the world is different and life changes from a peaceful duck pond to a mighty ocean, swept by storms and shot through by the glory of the sunrise. It's a cruel trick life has played me. Oh! why did you ever come to take my peace from me!

LEVERING. Rose, listen to me. In just three minutes I must go out of your life, forever. Had life kept on its even tenor, I would have gone away after our accidental moment of self-revelation and locked my lips with silence. But now, I'm leaving you—forever—Rose!

ROSE. Jack! forever?

LEVERING. Something tells me so, Rose. I've always known at the big moments of life. I'll not come back. Somehow that makes it seem right for me to tell you how much I've loved you. I did not know it until that evening,—do you remember: we were here alone. You were making supper before the fire and I was here on the settle.

ROSE [*Softly*]. Yes, I remember. [*She sinks to her knees before the fire.*]

LEVERING. You wore a little blue frock—blue like your eyes, and the dark curls lay warm upon your white neck. You were on your knees, as now, making toast for me; and suddenly, in my fancy, this was *my* home, *my* fireside, and you were *my* wife making supper for me; with the children,—*our* children, coming home to us. Oh, Rose! Rose! why could it not have been!

ROSE [*Musing*]. "Making supper for you before

the fire—"—and *now*—the fire is out. [*She wraps her arms about herself and whispers.*] I shall be cold—cold—*so* cold! [*The bugle note cuts across their dream.*]

JACK [*Rising hurriedly*]. Farewell, my love, say that you love me! A kiss—one kiss!

ROSE [*Who has sprung trembling to her feet at the bugle's note, keeps him away*]. No, no! Do not profane the memory of this last hour with an earthly touch. If we part so, we have robbed no one—no one! But know that my heart goes out with you to every adventure. When things are at their worst with you, out there in the cold and dark, with Death before you, know that my soul is there beside you, always, shoulder to shoulder; warming you, comforting you, loving you with all the power that is in me. [*He drops on his knee before her and bends his head for her blessing.*] Farewell, dear heart! [*She touches his head with her finger-tips and draws back.*] Now go—go! [*He rushes from the room. She falls on her knees before the bench and buries her head in her arms, shaken with emotion. Shortly the voices of* JEAN *and* JOHN *are heard off and soon they enter from the opposite direction to that which* LEVERING *took going off. Just as they enter,* ROSE *tries to pull herself together; turns, and, still on her knees facing the fire, taking up the bellows, tries to blow life into it. Enter* JOHN *and* JEAN.]

JEAN [*Gaily*]. Here's Daddy, Mummy. I stopped

by for him on my way home from the hospital. Here, Daddy, give me your coat—and hat! There, dear! [*She helps her father off with his things and hangs both his and hers on the costumer.*] Oh! a jolly fire! How nice! Let's have tea here, shall we, Daddy?

JOHN [*Sinking heavily on the settle*]. Very well, Jean.

JEAN. Good! I'll run and fetch the bread. [*She exits to the kitchen.*]

JOHN [*After a silence in which* ROSE *wakes the fire to flame and he gazes into it, lost in his misery*]. She *will* go, Rose.

ROSE. She must fulfil her destiny, John. Let us not begrudge it to her. [*She rises and goes down to table, facing away from the fire.*]

JEAN [*Re-entering from the kitchen with bread-slices and toasting-fork*]. Now! here we are all ready for a jolly feast.

JOHN [*Bitterly*]. Jolly!

JEAN [*Admonishing him*]. No grousing, sir, or I'll report you to your superior officer, won't I, Mummy? [ROSE *is struggling for self-control and does not reply.*] Come now, the answer is, "Yes, sir." Hustle up, Mummy, and get some more eats. We'll have one more lovely time here before this old fire, where so many wonderful things have happened to us. Smile, Daddy, smile!

JOHN [*Smiling wanly*]. Very well, little deserter, have it your own way. It's a good thing your mother

sticks to her guns. When *she* deserts me—it's all over

JEAN. Mummy! *She* never deserted any one, did you, Mummy?

ROSE [*Laughing a little wildly*]. Desert? God knows!

JEAN [*Easily*]. We all bet on you, Mummy. Now hustle the tea while I butter this toast. This is the most perfect fire we've had in a long time, isn't it, Daddy?

JOHN [*Trying to please her*]. Yes, dear, I think Mummy must have put something extra into it.

ROSE [*Softly*]. I did.

JEAN. Hurry up! I'm half through with the toast. Make my tea extra strong, Mummy.

JOHN [*Catching* ROSE's *hand as she passes, and kissing it*]. I daren't drink tea, Mummy. Make mine hot milk and skim off the cream.

ROSE [*At the kitchen door, looking back at* JEAN *and* JOHN *who are just where she and* LEVERING *have so lately been*]. Very well, dear, skim-milk. [*She exits.* JOHN *and* JEAN *hold position before the fire-light.*]

SLOW CURTAIN.